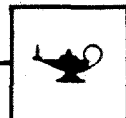


The Counterattack Stalls

4



The events of the night of 7–8 August 1950 demonstrated, once again, that the North Koreans were adept at using the cover of darkness to further their offensive preparations and to keep the American defenders off balance. Before midnight, Communist units made limited attacks on several companies in the 19th Infantry's sector east of the Naktong, as well as still another thrust into Sadung below the hills occupied by the 21st Infantry. The assaults against the 19th Infantry were repulsed in a series of firefights at close quarters, and the 21st Infantry believed it had broken up the North Korean crossing at Sadung solely with artillery fire. This latter assessment proved far too optimistic as Lieutenant Childers, commanding K Company, 21st Infantry, discovered shortly after midnight. Childers, alone in the company CP around 0100, suddenly was confronted by a squad of North Korean soldiers. Bolting quickly into the darkness, he withdrew to the position of the supporting 4.2-inch mortars, where he found a detail of men from the 14th Engineer (C) Battalion. Organizing the mortarmen and engineers into a roadblock team, Childers awaited the coming of dawn.¹

About the same time Childers was surprised, eight miles to the southeast the officers and men of Battery A, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, encountered unfriendly nocturnal visitors. Childers' CP near the Naktong was an obvious target for local infiltration, but Battery A was in the midst of a headquarters complex five miles from the river and at least two miles behind the infantry positions of the 34th and 19th Infantry regiments. Nevertheless, the artillerymen were organized for defense, and in a brief firefight, they drove off the North Korean intruders. Daylight revealed at least thirteen enemy bodies scattered outside Battery A's perimeter. Little notice was taken of this episode at 24th Division headquarters, perhaps because Battery A was a new arrival belonging to the 2d Division, but in retrospect, its significance is clear. The two-mile gap between Companies B and L of the 34th Infantry provided an unguarded corridor leading to the cluster of headquarters, service units, and artillery batteries at Kang-ni, Yu-ri, and Yongsan, as well as to the 24th Division's vital main supply route (MSR) leading back toward Miryang. Battery A's action at Yu-ri meant that North Korean infiltrators were at best only three miles from Yongsan, with nothing to prevent them from continuing eastward, as long as they remained

south of the Yongsan-Naktong road. But the surviving documentation does not indicate that anyone at the headquarters of the 24th Division drew this conclusion on 8 August. During the day, however, the now dismounted members of Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion, were assigned to provide local security to the artillery batteries west of Yongsan.²

Infiltration of American lines was by no means the most significant activity of the North Korean 4th Division during the night of 7–8 August. Its commander, Maj. Gen. Lee Kwon Mu, had finally mustered enough troops and boats to reinforce significantly his 16th Regiment already within the Naktong Bulge. During the final hours of darkness on the morning of 8 August, at least two battalions quietly slipped into the water at several points along the four-mile section of river front still in North Korean hands. The crossing, which used more than seventy boats and rafts, continued after daylight, when it was observed by Captain Alfonso's isolated companies still clinging to their perimeter just south of one of the major North Korean ferry sites. Alfonso's men fired on the North Koreans at long range with a .50-caliber machine gun and called for an air strike. Upon their arrival, the aircraft strafed the exposed North Koreans for some time, causing them to disperse momentarily. Nevertheless, when the planes departed, the Communists resumed their crossing. Alfonso next called for artillery fire, but the number of tubes available was too small to provide a significant concentration, and the enemy crossing continued. By 0815, an aerial observer reported the Bulge area to be full of North Koreans, and at 0852, Alfonso's Company A reported it was under enemy fire. Fortunately for Alfonso, the North Koreans for the moment were more interested in pushing men and supplies across the Naktong than in eliminating his little band of infantrymen.³

By now it had become obvious to General Church and his staff that the main thrust of the North Korean attack on the 24th Division lay in the Naktong Bulge sector held by the 34th and 19th Infantry regiments. Enemy infiltrators in small numbers caused some anxious moments for Company K of the 21st Infantry around Sadung during the morning, but they represented only a diversion. On the division's right flank, Task Force Hyzer continued to patrol its enormous frontage while waiting for units of the 1st Cavalry Division to assume responsibility for much of the sector, in accordance with the boundary change decreed by Eighth Army. Enemy activity in Task Force Hyzer's zone was virtually nonexistent during the day, another indication that the North Korean 4th Division had staked its hopes on a drive toward Yongsan through Beauchamp's and Moore's depleted regiments.⁴

Beauchamp's 34th Infantry remained fragmented throughout 8 August. The four companies on the southern flank of the enemy penetration remained inactive all day, trading sporadic fire with North Korean units slowly approaching their isolated position. Company I, separated from its parent unit far to the south and beyond Beauchamp's effective control, was officially attached to the 19th Infantry by division order. Only Company B, holding the ridge east of the village of Tugok, was capable of offensive



The M-24 tank (General Chaffee)

action. During the afternoon, it tried again to break through to Alfonso's enclave on the river. The infantrymen moved through Tugok and assaulted the ridge beyond, but strong enemy resistance prevented them from going farther. After holding Tugok for approximately four hours, they fell back to their original positions. Little had been gained except the rescue of some men from the 34th's Heavy Mortar Company, who had been in hiding since 6 August.⁵

Supporting Company B in its abortive advance were the two remaining M-24 light tanks of Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion. As the infantry drive faltered, the tanks forged ahead and suddenly came under fire from several 14.5-mm antitank rifles. Hit by fragments, the commander of the leading tank was incapacitated. The loader, Pfc. Louis Kappler, took command of the tank and continued the fight, although he was wounded in both arms. When Kappler fainted from loss of blood, the commander of the second tank, Sgt. Ervin Yates, whose own vehicle had been disabled by a shot in the engine, raced to Kappler's tank and took control. Blasting his way forward, Yates destroyed several North Korean heavy weapons emplacements before nightfall forced him to withdraw. On the way to the rear, he attached a tow cable to the other tank and dragged it to safety. Both Kappler and Yates were later recommended for the Silver Star.⁶

As on the previous day, the 24th Division's primary counterattack was assigned to Col. Ned Moore's 19th Infantry. Moore had arranged for an air strike to open the fight at 0700 and had specifically requested the use of napalm and rockets. At the appointed time, no aircraft appeared. Artillery marked the target, Hill 165 and vicinity, at 0730 but the sky remained empty of planes. Finally, at 0800, after 155-mm white phosphorous shells

marked the target a second time, the aircraft arrived. To Moore's chagrin, they carried neither bombs nor rockets and strafed the hill with bullets only. Upon their departure at 0830, the artillery began a barrage to soften up the target.⁷

Moore's orders from General Church required him to determine the enemy's strength and dispositions while maintaining pressure through limited offensive action. He therefore planned to make only minor advances on the right near the river, while consolidating those companies scattered throughout the mass of hills. Accordingly, Company E moved up on line with Companies F and C and prepared to advance. After repulsing a probe by a North Korean platoon against E, the three companies began to move forward from their positions on Ohang Hill. They quickly encountered heavy fire from North Koreans dug in on the opposing ridge beyond the village of Ohang in the valley below. Having discovered that the enemy was present in force, the companies halted and consolidated their positions. From their new location overlooking the valley, they were able to fire on North Koreans attempting to remove American vehicles abandoned in the first day's fighting, but this contributed nothing to the reduction of the enemy salient.⁸

Moore reserved his major effort for Hill 165 on his left, which had already changed hands several times on the previous day. Once more, Company A was assigned to assault the hill, while Company B on a nearby ridge provided both direct fire support and adjustments for mortars and artillery. Around 0900, Company A, supported by the fire of the regiment's 4.2-inch and 81-mm mortars, began a methodical attack from the north. By noon, the infantrymen had fought their way halfway up the hill. At that moment, a flight of F-51 Mustangs roared overhead and proceeded to bomb, rocket, and strafe the area indiscriminately. Company A was shattered and the 81-mm mortars of Company D were silenced. Seizing the opportunity, the North Koreans added their own heavy mortar fire to the bombardment. A hail of 120-mm mortar shells not only hastened Company A's withdrawal but also fell among the 19th Infantry's 4.2-inch mortar positions and on the road leading back to Kang-ni. Blasted by the combined friendly and enemy firepower, Company A reeled back in disorder to the village of Mii-ri, where it was finally rallied. The North Koreans pressed close behind, forcing the 1st Battalion CP to evacuate Mii-ri in haste. Finally, with the aid of accurate artillery fire, the position was stabilized, but there would be no further advance by the 19th Infantry on 8 August (see map 7).⁹

The inability of the 24th Division to make any progress in reducing the North Korean penetration made it necessary for General Church to commit his last remaining reserve unit to the fight. A battalion of the 9th Infantry from the 2d Division had been available at Ch'angnyong for twenty-four hours, and another battalion from the same unit, along with regimental headquarters, was en route from the coast. As Col. John G. Hill, the commander of the 9th Infantry, led his column over the pass between Miryang and Yongsan, a messenger met him with instructions to hurry forward to Ch'angnyong for a conference with General Church. Leaving

his men to follow at their own pace, Hill paused in Yongsan only long enough to greet Beauchamp, an old friend, before heading north to the 24th Division CP.

At midmorning, Hill found General Church sitting on a box getting his hair cut. The diminutive general described to Hill the situation in simple terms: "This fellow has busted right through my center and is looking down my throat. I will give you planes for reconnaissance and my artillery to help. I want you to attack at once." Hill argued that his units, on the road since 0200 and not yet concentrated at Yongsan, would need time to get their bearings before being committed to action. Church initially wanted the advance to begin by 1500, but after Hill vigorously pressed for a delay, the division commander set 1600 as the time for the counterattack. Hill was to take his two battalions and strike due west against the nose of the enemy penetration. He would be supported by Batteries A and B (the latter just arrived) of his own 15th Field Artillery Battalion, as well as by the batteries from the 11th and 13th Battalions already supporting the 34th Infantry.¹⁰

With his two infantry battalions concentrated around Yongsan, Hill conferred at noon with his battalion and company commanders. At the meeting, Hill outlined his proposed plan of operations. Under it, the 1st Battalion was assigned the right of the regimental line, while the 2d Battalion was given the left. Company F and the regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon would serve as regimental reserve. The goal of the attack was the Naktong's east bank, and the fight was to be pressed until dark, although it was not to be hurried. All of these instructions were embodied in an attack order issued at 1315. This document took into account the North Korean thrust toward Mii-ri from Hill 165 by making the hill the initial priority of the 1st Battalion and by retaining Company F nearby as a reserve.

Compared with the battle-weakened regiments of the 24th Division, the 9th Infantry was a large unit. Although its 3d Battalion had been withheld as a reserve for Eighth Army, the two remaining battalions each numbered over 800 officers and men. Having recently arrived from the United States, the troops were fresh but untried. Morale was high, and the men were eager to get into action after the boredom of the long sea voyage and the dreary camps around Pusan. In general, the regiment's equipment status was excellent, although there were serious shortages of 4.2-inch mortar shells and 3.5-inch rockets. Even salt tablets were available to help the troops survive the blistering heat of the afternoon sun without becoming exhausted from dehydration.¹¹

By 1445, the regiment had begun to move through the rear echelons of the 34th and 19th Infantry regiments in preparation for its assault. All was not ready, however, until 1645 when both battalions crossed the line of departure. The intense heat and humidity slowed the advance to a crawl as the men struggled to drag their heavy weapons forward with the rifle companies. After only a few yards, the 1st Battalion, on the right, encoun-

tered light enemy fire from both small arms and mortars. Several mortar rounds landed near the battalion's forward CP. The North Korean resistance, coupled with the high temperature which produced numerous cases of heat exhaustion, caused the attack to falter almost immediately on the right. Recoiling from the enemy fire, the battalion drifted to the northwest, away from the fight. In contrast, the 2d Battalion, on the left, made considerable progress against no appreciable resistance, largely because it advanced over ground secured earlier by Company B of the 34th Infantry. Nightfall found Colonel Hill's 1st Battalion tied in with the left flank of Moore's 19th Infantry, while his 2d Battalion dug in near the 34th's Company B, on the hills south and east of Tugok. The yawning two-mile gap between that point and Alfonso's enclave remained open for North Korean exploitation (see map 7).¹²

The manner in which the 9th Infantry was employed on 8 August represented a lost opportunity to make a significant contribution to the course of the battle. General Church's orders to Hill had been extremely vague but had required an immediate response. Given the limited time available to familiarize himself with the terrain and situation, Hill had chosen to use the Yongsan-Naktong road as his general axis of advance. He had also chosen to send his untried troops forward slowly and to pass them carefully through elements of the other regiments. The result was to squander the 24th Division's only foreseeable major reinforcement in simply bolstering the center of the threatened sector, while the enemy continued to exploit an opening of major proportions on the division's left. Had Hill been given more time to survey his situation and deploy his men, he might have been able to strike the enemy a hard blow with his two large battalions or at least reestablish a continuous division front. Denied that time by Church, he was unable to do more than devise a hurried, pedestrian response. Thus, the potential for a decisive counterattack was dissipated as the 9th Infantry was drawn piecemeal into the confused fighting for Hill 165 at the center of the North Korean penetration.

Nightfall of 8 August found the 24th Division no nearer its goal of restoring the Naktong line than it had been on the previous evening. In contrast, the North Koreans had materially reinforced the 16th Regiment's initial penetration with most, if not all, of another regiment. Even in areas where Church's troops had regained the river, such as the sector reoccupied by Company I, 34th Infantry, numbers of enemy soldiers had vanished into the hills only to reappear later in seemingly secure rear areas. Briefly during the afternoon, some of these infiltrators interdicted the Ch'angnyong-Naktong road little more than two miles from the division's headquarters. The hours of darkness saw a significant increase in North Korean artillery fire, which fell near both Church's CP at Ch'angnyong and the 21st Infantry's CP three miles to the north. These incidents, alone, meant little, but when combined with events in the Yongsan sector to the south, they clearly depicted a division that had completely lost the initiative.¹³

By its own estimate, the condition of the 24th Division on the evening of 8 August was poor, with combat efficiency standing at only 40 percent. Combat efficiency of the 34th Infantry, which numbered no more than 1100

men, was estimated at 24 percent. The 19th Infantry, with 1700 men, and the 21st Infantry, with 1800, rated 42 percent and 40 percent respectively. Organic division strength was 9,883, although attached units brought the grand total to 13,476. Casualties had been heavy and the flow of replacements no more than a trickle. The division remained seriously deficient in machine guns, 81-mm and 4.2-inch mortars, BARs, M-24 tanks, jeeps, and trucks. Nor was the ammunition supply system functioning smoothly, especially in regard to artillery items. In fact, a critical shortage of 155-mm artillery fuses during the day was alleviated only by an emergency airlift of a small quantity from Eighth Army reserve stocks in Taegu. Grievous as these deficiencies were, General Church had no alternative but to order a continuation of the counterattack on the following day.¹⁴

During the night of 8–9 August, a significant change occurred in the dispositions of the 34th Infantry on the south flank of the North Korean penetration. Ever since the initial enemy crossing on 6 August, Captain Alfonso's Companies A, C, and L had maintained a perimeter on the hills overlooking the Naktong about two miles forward of the main American battle line. Virtually unmolested by the North Koreans on 7 August, these men were in radio contact with the 1st Battalion CP and had received supplies by air. On 8 August, this relatively tolerable situation had deteriorated markedly. Heavily reinforced, the North Koreans in the Naktong Bulge had begun to move toward the beleaguered Americans, while the air-drop of that date had missed Alfonso's perimeter completely. Seeing the enemy massing for an attack upon his position during the night, Alfonso requested permission for his men to break out to the east. After checking with Colonel Beauchamp, Lieutenant Colonel Ayres of the 1st Battalion gave his approval.

Burdened by numerous casualties, Alfonso ordered his able-bodied soldiers to take turns carrying the wounded by rotating bearers from the front of the column to the rear. To facilitate the withdrawal, he chose to use the Yongsan road as far as possible, ignoring Ayres' suggestion to employ a more circuitous route to avoid enemy contact. Assembling his men on the road at 2230, Alfonso led the column northeastward. No sooner had they left their defensive positions on the hills overlooking the road than the enemy attacked in strength. Finding the Americans moving away, the North Koreans began to interdict the road with automatic weapons fire. This fire destroyed Alfonso's scheme of rotating litter bearers, as no one in front was willing to move nearer the enemy, who was pressing close behind.

By the time Alfonso's column reached the site of the American mortar positions abandoned on 6 August, it had begun to lose its cohesion. Knowing that he had encountered large numbers of North Koreans in the immediate vicinity two days before, Alfonso halted the column before it entered the narrow defile leading past the village of Tugok. Mistakenly expecting to find a guide there sent by Ayres, the captain grew apprehensive when none appeared. As dawn approached on 9 August, Alfonso decided to seek a route around the enemy positions suspected to be ahead. Taking two men with him and leaving the rest in a makeshift perimeter, he walked southeast for about two miles, then turned northeast, ultimately reaching the

road again near Ayres' CP. While Alfonso reported to Ayres, a sergeant went back to guide the men to safety. Meanwhile, the companies had disintegrated into several small groups, each seeking to escape independently. Twenty-five men from Companies A and L reached the battalion CP at 1340, while other groups, after taking a longer detour, struck the road about a mile west of Yongsan. One group of seventy men had been pinned down for several hours in midmorning by machine gun fire, and no more than forty of them had escaped the trap, leaving behind both their dead and wounded. The survivors of the three companies were fed a hot meal and sent to rest and reorganize in the regimental rear.¹⁵

The departure of Alfonso's men from their positions on the river widened the hole in the 24th Division's line, leaving Company K of the 34th Infantry isolated on the division's left flank. At 0635, the company's northernmost outpost was overrun by North Korean units, as was a patrol sent earlier to contact Alfonso. Within an hour, a reinforced platoon from the company counterattacked to regain the lost position, but the attack was unsuccessful. Instead, Company K was forced to relinquish a mile of riverfront in the face of large numbers of North Koreans moving openly around its right and into its rear. By early afternoon, the company had bent its line into a right angle to avoid being flanked but was in serious danger of being pinned against the Nakdong as the North Koreans continued to exploit the gap in the 24th Division's line.¹⁶

The developments on the division's southern flank in the early morning hours of 9 August had no effect on General Church's plans for dealing with the North Korean penetration. Since Beauchamp's 34th Infantry was in tatters and Moore's 19th Infantry had been reduced to less than 300 riflemen in each of its battalions, Church's primary reliance shifted to Colonel Hill's 9th Infantry. Fresh from the United States, this unit was large but green. This inexperience had been much in evidence on the previous day when the regiment had failed to come to grips with the enemy because of faulty staff work and the inadequate physical conditioning of its men. Whatever its faults, Church planned to employ Hill's regiment on 9 August in still another counterattack against North Korean strongpoints around Hill 165 and the village of Tugok. The attack was to be supported by a diversionary air strike against enemy positions facing the 19th Infantry, adjacent to the 9th on its right.¹⁷

The planned air strike, however, did not materialize at the appointed hour because air controllers of the 1st Cavalry Division diverted it en route to deal with a minor breakthrough on their own front. Nevertheless, the 9th Infantry began its advance shortly after 0545. Once again, its misunderstanding of its position in relation to both friendly and enemy units hindered the 1st Battalion. By the time its advance wilted under the midmorning heat, only Company B had managed to place a platoon on the slopes of Hill 165. Hostile fire soon forced even that unit to withdraw, leaving the North Koreans firmly in control of the hill. A mile to the south, the 2d Battalion encountered even greater difficulties. Companies E and G were assigned to seize Tugok and the ridge beyond with the aid of Company

B of the 34th Infantry and the sole remaining tank of Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion. Initially, the battalion made progress, with a platoon from Company E reaching the ridge behind Tugok, while Companies B and G gained part of the high ridge across the road to the southeast. These gains, however, were only temporary, as a violent North Korean counterattack quickly sent all three companies reeling back to their original starting points. Casualties were especially heavy in the 2d Battalion and included the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Fred L. Harrison, who was seriously wounded.¹⁸

By noon, the counterattack of the 9th Infantry had stalled, and the regiment's poorly conditioned troops were exhausted. Without adequate water discipline, most of the men in the rifle companies had drained their canteens early and were now suffering severely from the effects of heat and humidity. Supplies of salt tablets and fresh water were sent forward along with ammunition, but the troops were unable to resume their advance until the late afternoon. In the interim, Church ordered his assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. Pearson Menoher, to arrange a coordinated attack by all units later in the day. Around 1400, Menoher met with Beauchamp, Moore, and Hill at the 19th Infantry's CP at Kang-ni. There it was agreed that the three regiments would launch a coordinated attack all along the line at 1700. The 19th Infantry, on the right, would strike toward the high ground beyond the villages of Ohang and Sinam-ni, while the 9th Infantry, on the left, would assault both Tugok and Hill 165. Company B of the 34th Infantry, with its attached tank, would assist the 9th Infantry's 2d Battalion in its drive on Tugok. The attack would be preceded by a ten-minute artillery barrage beginning at 1650. Ominously, while the conference was in session, observers at the front reported small groups of North Koreans moving to reinforce Hill 165.¹⁹

Hill 165 and its associated ridges now had become the focal point of the battle as far as the 24th Division was concerned. Although overshadowed by the hills to the west, also in enemy hands, it dominated the lower hills and valleys to the east. From its crest, an observer could look directly down the road through Kang-ni toward Yongsan, five miles away. North Korean snipers dug in on its slopes were able to make life miserable for American units located on adjacent but lower hills. Holding a position less than 500 yards north of Hill 165, Company B of the 19th Infantry suffered especially from this sniping. After eleven men of the company had been hit, a sergeant named Dudley organized his own sniping party and responded in kind. He and his men were so successful in countering the enemy fire that Dudley later was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.²⁰

While the troops at the front took advantage of the afternoon lull and their officers planned the next counterattack, activity of a different sort characterized General Church's headquarters at Ch'angnyong. The headquarters had been harassed on the previous day by reports of infiltrators in their vicinity and by random artillery fire. These annoyances worsened during the morning of 9 August. Several artillery rounds burst uncomfort-

ably near the division CP at 0430, and half an hour later another report arrived of enemy infiltration just west of town. During the morning, patrols from the composite defense platoons searched the hills for the elusive infiltrators, but little could be done about the artillery fire, which sporadically ranged over the area between Ch'angnyong and the river. After more rounds detonated near Ch'angnyong at 1120, Church ordered the division's headquarters to relocate to Kyun'gyo, eight miles east of Yongsan and almost fifteen from Ch'angnyong (for location of Kyun'gyo, see map 3).²¹

Although executed in an orderly fashion, the displacement of Danger Forward, as the division's advance CP was known, necessarily interrupted the normal functioning of its components. Defensive outposts were ordered in at 1230, and the first headquarters elements departed an hour later. Among the first units to move was a detachment of the 24th Signal Company, whose mission was to establish communications circuits at the new location. Around 1600, the division staff sections left Ch'angnyong, although the section chiefs remained behind with skeleton crews to control operations until the new CP at Kyun'gyo was open for business. Most of the convoys arrived at Kyun'gyo after about two hours on the road, but persistent communications problems prevented the new headquarters from being fully operational for some time. Compounding the confusion was an unannounced visit to Church by Lt. Gen. Walton Walker, commanding Eighth Army.



Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker,
Commander,
Eighth U.S. Army

Thus distracted, the 24th Division's command structure did not devote its full attention to either its own impending counterattack or the continued crumbling of the division's left flank.²²

At 1650, the artillery preparation began. The arrival of Batteries A and B, 15th Field Artillery Battalion, and the reequipment of Battery B, 13th Field Artillery Battalion, permitted the concentration of eighteen 105-mm howitzers for the first time since the battle had begun. In addition, Battery B, 11th Field Artillery, joined the bombardment with its heavier 155-mm howitzers. While the artillery fired on the North Korean forward positions, aircraft struck enemy targets nearer the river, including suspected North Korean gun positions beyond the Naktong.²³

The counterattack began promptly at 1700, but it never became the powerful, coordinated thrust contemplated by the officers attending the afternoon conference at Kang-ni. On the right, the 2d Battalion, 19th Infantry, moved off Ohang Hill and attempted to seize the ridge beyond Ohang village. Numbering no more than 280 riflemen, the battalion was unable to gain any ground. The effort, however, cost numerous casualties from enemy fire and heat exhaustion. Included among the latter were the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Robert Rhea and his operations officer. Even more depleted than its sister unit, the 1st Battalion did not even attempt to advance. On the other flank, Company B of the 34th Infantry was similarly inactive, although its attached light tank contributed to the preliminary bombardment.²⁴

The inability of the 19th and 34th Infantry regiments to gain ground placed the burden of the counterattack upon Colonel Hill's 9th Infantry. Hill 165 was to be assaulted by the 1st Battalion from the north and Company E of the 2d Battalion from the southeast. A difficult operation at best in terrain affording limited visibility, this simultaneous attack from several directions avoided casualties from friendly fire only because the timing of the attack broke down. Although Company E easily began climbing the slopes of the objective fifteen minutes after crossing the line of departure, the 1st Battalion delayed its own advance because of coordination problems with the supporting artillery. By the time the 1st Battalion went into action, Company E was hard pressed by the North Korean defenders and unable to reach the crest of the hill. Nevertheless, it grimly clung to the southern slope, while the three companies of the 1st Battalion fought their way southward onto the western slope. The crest of Hill 165, which lay to the east, was neutralized but not occupied. Meanwhile, a mile to the south, Company G of the 2d Battalion advanced through Tugok and onto the ridge beyond, only to find itself isolated there. With darkness rapidly approaching and further coordination impossible, all units dug in where they were for the night. Hill planned to resume the attack at first light, but he expected little from his 2d Battalion, which had lost its commander in the morning and had been roughly handled by the enemy in the afternoon assault (see map 8).²⁵

The initial reports reaching General Church portrayed the results of the counterattack in glowing terms, and it was not until 2330 that Hill

forwarded a more somber assessment.²⁶ In the interim, a series of sighting reports began to arrive from the division's southern flank. About an hour after sunset, the 19th Infantry reported North Korean troops in various locations stretching all the way to Namji-ri on the Naktong, far behind the 24th Division's left flank. When added to similar reports from the 34th Infantry and the pilot of an artillery spotter plane, this information produced a disturbing picture. If true, the reports indicated that the North Koreans had not only isolated Company K of the 34th Infantry but were about to drive a large wedge between the 24th Division and the neighboring 25th Division to the south. Yongsan itself was in danger, as was the MSR to Miryang. In sum, the trickle of North Koreans through the gap in the division's line was on the verge of becoming a torrent unless immediate corrective action was taken.²⁷

Suspecting that they were in danger of being flanked, Colonels Hill, Beauchamp, and Moore warned their regiments to be especially vigilant during the night. In addition, Beauchamp ordered Company L of his 3d Battalion to move to the aid of Company K on the river. Seriously depleted by its recent ordeal, Company L had been resting near Yongsan for only a few hours when it received orders at 2100 to return to the Naktong. The unit departed immediately, reached K Company at 0115 on 10 August, and took up position on K's right three hours later. This action by Beauchamp narrowed the gap in the division's front but did not close it.²⁸

Throughout the night of 9–10 August, the headquarters elements of the 24th Division remained split, with most of the staff located at the new CP at Kyun'gyo, while the section chiefs were still at Ch'angnyong. This may account for the division's slow response to the North Korean flanking maneuver, already far advanced. Church and his staff planned nothing more for 10 August than a continuation of the previous afternoon's coordinated attacks against the center of the enemy's line. Yet information available to at least part of the staff indicated a serious problem on the division left that called for an entirely different response.²⁹

The exact sequence of events that occurred within the division command structure is impossible to recapture with the documentation available, but certain facts are known. At 2137 on 9 August, the S2 of the 19th Infantry transmitted to division headquarters a report indicating that significant numbers of North Korean soldiers were moving into the division's rear through a gap in the front line. This report, later proven to be substantially correct, was received at 2150 by the division G2 section and at 2227 by the division G3 section. At 0015 on 10 August, G3, in turn, provided the information to the 21st Infantry, holding the right of the division sector. At 0400, the same report was included in an intelligence summary forwarded to Eighth Army headquarters at Taegu. Thus, the crucial information was in the hands of at least part of the division staff before midnight on 9 August, and it was considered important enough to be transmitted to other units as well as to higher headquarters. When, or if, the report reached General Church is not known. In any event, the division commander did not act to

close the gap in his line until shortly after 1200 on 10 August. Once again, the 24th Division was reacting too slowly to an enemy initiative.³⁰

The counterattack planned by the 9th, 19th, and 34th Infantry regiments for the morning of 10 August essentially duplicated the previous afternoon's plan for a coordinated attack. Following a preliminary artillery bombardment, the 9th and 19th Infantry regiments, assisted by part of the 34th, were to assault the hills and ridges opposite them and drive all the way to the river. At 0545, three batteries of 105-mm and one of 155-mm howitzers opened fire on the enemy frontline positions and continued their bombardment for fifteen minutes. Farther to the west, air strikes hampered North Korean movement across the Naktong.³¹

On the right of the line, the 19th Infantry jumped off on time at 0600. It employed only its 2d Battalion, since the 1st Battalion was masked by part of the 9th Infantry in its front. Companies E and F began the advance, with G in reserve some distance to the rear. Drained by battle casualties, heat exhaustion, and straggling, none of the companies was larger than a normal platoon. Within fifteen minutes, Company E, on the right, was pinned down by enemy fire from the direction of the river. This effectively stalled the attack of the 2d Battalion, and the initiative passed to the North Koreans. At 0725, Company E reported that it was in "bad shape," and by 0935, it had been isolated by enemy assaults. The battalion commander hurriedly called up the two usable platoons of Company G, which fought their way along the river in an effort to relieve Company E. By 1050, Company C of the 1st Battalion was also moving to the aid of the 2d Battalion. With this assistance, the remnants of Company E broke free from encirclement and withdrew to safety. The North Koreans followed them, seizing Ohang Hill in the process. By the time its position was stabilized on the next line of hills to the north, the 2d Battalion had been driven back 750 yards (see map 9).³²

On the left of Moore's 19th Infantry, Hill's 9th Infantry also crossed the line of departure on time. Almost at once, it came under intense artillery and mortar fire but continued to attack. The objectives of the 1st Battalion were to consolidate its hold on Hill 165, then to seize the villages of Maekkok and Sugae-ri to the west. Company B spent the morning clearing Hill 165, Company A moved into Sugae-ri with relative ease, but Company C was unable to wrest Maekkok from the North Koreans. To the south, the 2d Battalion actually lost ground, as Company G was forced to withdraw from its exposed position west of Tugok. As for the 34th Infantry's participation, Company B and the Heavy Mortar Company clung to the lower slopes of Obong-ni Ridge but did not move forward.³³

At 1000, a violent North Korean counterattack struck the units around Tugok and Obong-ni. Both the 2d Battalion of the 9th Infantry and the two companies of the 34th Infantry reeled backward under the pressure. The blow fell especially hard on the 2d Battalion, where only one company had more than one officer, and the battalion commander, a major, had just assumed command. When the North Koreans struck, the officers of the 2d

Battalion lost control, and the unit began to disintegrate as it withdrew. Racing back to the regimental CP, the battalion commander told Colonel Hill his unit could not hold. After reprimanding the major for leaving his battalion, Hill returned with him to the front. There, they found the battalion executive officer restoring order with the relatively unshaken Company F. By afternoon, the situation had been stabilized, but 2,000 yards of critical terrain had been lost.³⁴

The successful North Korean attack further widened the hole in the front line and exacerbated the growing problem of infiltration on the 24th Division's left flank. In this area, the Naktong ran in an easterly direction and served as the boundary between the 24th and 25th Divisions. The main road connecting the two divisions crossed the Naktong on a bridge near Namji-ri, about six miles south of Yongsan. North Korean units had entered Namji-ri on the previous evening and by noon on 10 August were probing northward toward Yongsan itself. Unaware that the area was infested with small groups of the enemy, American troops continued to use the road to move supplies, and they relaxed in what they believed to be a secure rear area. One such group, five men from Battery A, 26th AAA Battalion, spent the morning swimming in a pond north of Namji-ri. Returning to K Company, 34th Infantry, they were halted around 1430 by a North Korean roadblock. Overpowered by the enemy, they joined several other Americans already captured at the same place.³⁵

Although he was not yet aware of the roadblock south of Yongsan, General Church had finally resolved to deal with the gap on the left of his front. During the morning, his intelligence and operations officers visited the various regiments to gain firsthand knowledge of the situation. By 1100, the division G2 had reached the new headquarters at Kyun'gyo, and the information he brought from the 34th Infantry may have inspired Church to act. At any rate, by 1240, Church had tentatively decided to transfer a battalion of Colonel Stephens' 21st Infantry south to the 34th's sector to assist in plugging the hole. Rather than act precipitately, Church decided to visit Stephens at his CP north of Ch'angnyong before making a final decision.³⁶

Church reached the 21st Infantry CP around 1300. Finding only light enemy activity in front of the regiment, he quickly confirmed his initial decision and ordered Stephens to detach Lieutenant Colonel Smith's 1st Battalion for duty south of Yongsan. Smith's force consisted of only three companies, A, B, and D (Weapons), since Company C had not yet arrived from Korea's east coast. While Stephens was concerned about Smith's departure, which would be visible to the North Koreans watching from the heights west of the Naktong, he was assured that Company C and an attached artillery battery had been released by Eighth Army and were en route to join him. Church then departed to visit Task Force Hyzer, while Stephens and his staff gathered the trucks needed to move Smith's battalion. By 1645, the 1st Battalion was on the way south. As Stephens had predicted, the enemy noted its departure and attempted to hasten it with artillery fire.³⁷

Even before Smith's men began to move, Church discovered that the situation on his left was more serious than he had earlier believed. Passing through Yongsan at 1600 on his way back to Kyun'gyo, Church and his assistant division commander, Brigadier General Menoher, learned of the North Korean roadblocks on the road to Namji-ri. Momentarily without units to respond to the crisis, Church contacted his G3, Lieutenant Colonel James Snee, at Kyun'gyo. Told to seek aid wherever necessary, Snee attempted to contact both Eighth Army at Taegu and the 25th Division to the south, but his land lines were dead. At 1610, he drafted a Flash message for Eighth Army and ordered it sent in the clear. He dispatched a similar message at 1625 by light aircraft to the 25th Division. Both messages requested assistance from the 27th Infantry, a part of the 25th Division that had just moved into Eighth Army reserve near Masan.³⁸

While Snee attempted to gain the use of the 27th Infantry, Church departed for Kyun'gyo. He left General Menoher at Yongsan to coordinate the activities of whatever units might be found to counter the enemy's southern thrust. Initially, the only unit available was the Heavy Mortar Company of Beauchamp's 34th Infantry, one of the companies forced back from Obong-ni during the morning North Korean attack. At 1640, the company received orders to move down the Namji-ri road to guard Yongsan's southern approaches. Twenty-five minutes later, General Church ordered the 24th Recon Company detached from Task Force Hyzer and sent to Yongsan. At 1730, in response to Church's earlier plea for aid, Eighth

Brig. Gen. Pearson Menoher,
Assistant Division Commander,
24th Infantry Division



Army ordered the 27th Infantry to send a battalion northward to secure the Naktong bridge at Namji-ri.³⁹

Ever so gradually, the forces summoned by the 24th Division's call for help began to arrive. While Menoher waited for the 24th Recon Company to appear with its light tanks, he supported the handful of heavy mortar crewmen by calling in air strikes on the road north of Namji-ri. At 1850, he reported that the North Koreans were within two and one-half miles of Yongsan. Shortly thereafter, the 24th Recon Company arrived after a thirteen-mile journey from Sibi-ri. While it prepared to go into action, Menoher reported the situation to Church, who told him to remain at Yongsan until the situation was stable and a coordinated plan had been developed for action the next day. Church also passed along the wishes of Walton Walker, Eighth Army commander, to "get that place cleared up."⁴⁰

At 2000, the 3d Platoon of the 24th Recon Company began its attack down the road toward Namji-ri. Meeting no resistance for approximately three miles, the tankers finally encountered an enemy machine gun position supported by riflemen. Since they had been told that a company of the 34th Infantry was following to secure any ground gained, the tankers halted to await its arrival. They waited until after darkness fell, but no infantry could be found except the mortarmen already present. Unwilling to risk his tanks without adequate infantry support, the platoon leader pulled everyone back about 500 yards and established his own roadblock at 2300 (see maps 3 and 9).⁴¹

South of the Naktong, Lt. Col. Gordon Murch's 2d Battalion of the 27th Infantry and Battery B, 8th Field Artillery Battalion, departed at 1930 for Namji-ri. Murch expected action since a patrol attempting to contact the 24th Division via the Namji-ri bridge had been turned back by enemy fire earlier in the day. On the way north, progress was impeded by thousands of refugees moving in the opposite direction. Trying to avoid one of the heavy trucks, a refugee cart tipped over, revealing a cache of guns and ammunition. Several North Koreans disguised as refugees dashed for the hills, but most were shot down by Murch's men. Thus delayed, the 2d Battalion did not reach the Naktong until long after nightfall. On nearing the bridge, the troops encountered light resistance. Deploying his three companies, Murch ordered Company F to seize a bridgehead on the other side of the river. While Company F fought its way over the bridge, Companies E and G took positions on hills overlooking the crossing site. Rather than proceed farther in the darkness against opposition of unknown strength, Murch decided to wait for daylight before advancing beyond his bridgehead.⁴²

Nightfall also brought an end to operations on the main division front. Once again, a supposedly coordinated counterattack had lacked coordination. Only the 1st Battalion of the 9th Infantry had made any progress at all, while the 19th Infantry, on its right, had only held in place, and the units on its left had been driven back in disorder. Unable to capture Maekkok and unsupported on either flank, the 1st Battalion withdrew to

the vicinity of Hill 165 and dug in for the night. The battalion's new position allowed it to tie in more closely with the 19th Infantry on its right but left a large gap in the direction of the 9th Infantry's 2d Battalion on the left.⁴³

The inability of the three regiments to advance in the center and the developing threat to his left flank caused General Church to seek a better solution to the problem of coordination. Previously, all three regimental commanders had been free to act independently. Any coordination that occurred was more the result of goodwill among Moore, Hill, and Beauchamp, and the tireless efforts of Assistant Division Commander Menoher, than of conscious design. To end the confusion, late on 10 August Church created Task Force Hill, under Col. John G. Hill, the senior colonel in the sector. Hill was given control of his own regiment, Moore's 19th Infantry, Beauchamp's 34th Infantry, and the 1st Battalion of the 21st Infantry, which had reached an assembly area southwest of Yongsan during the night. He was charged with devising a plan that would eradicate the North Korean penetration at the earliest possible time. When the plan was complete, General Menoher would bring it to division headquarters at Kyun'gyo.⁴⁴

Vested with his new authority, Hill convened a conference during the night at a schoolhouse in Yongsan. Present were Hill, Moore, Beauchamp, their regimental operations officers, and the commanders of the 13th and 15th Field Artillery Battalions. In its final form, the plan called for the 19th and 9th Infantry to attack southwest toward the Naktong, just as they had been doing for several days. Meanwhile Smith's battalion of the 21st Infantry would attempt to roll up the right flank of the North Korean line. The 34th Infantry would protect Smith's left flank as he advanced. The plan did not address the developing threat to Yongsan from the south nor the fact that Smith's assembly area was dangerously near the enemy's line of transit to Namji-ri. In effect, the plan assumed that the area south-east of Obong-ni Ridge was unoccupied territory where Smith could maneuver without hindrance (see map 9).⁴⁵

By midnight, Church estimated that the 24th Division was barely holding its own against an enemy continually being reinforced from across the Naktong. Organic division strength stood at 9755, with 5401 attached, for a total of 15,156 officers and men. The number of replacements reaching the division was slowly increasing, 247 being shipped to units on 10 August, although a growing number of stragglers partially negated these gains. Similarly, increased quantities of weapons were arriving in the division area, significantly reducing shortages in machine guns and mortars. While the division still lacked 16 M-24 tanks, 292 1 1/4-ton trucks, 88 3/4-ton trucks, and 87 2 1/2-ton trucks, these deficiencies were not crippling as long as the division remained generally on the defensive. Ammunition stocks, except for mortar shells, were adequate. The supply of salt tablets, however, was insufficient to meet consumption rates and required emergency efforts to increase the supply.⁴⁶

Operationally, the 24th Division's G2 section expected the North Koreans to continue to attack out of their bridgehead to effect a junction with their units blocking the road from Yongsan to Namji-ri. It was this movement that the next day's attack by Smith's battalion of the 21st Infantry was designed to forestall. Prudently, the 24th Division's Headquarters Company was ordered to patrol the roads leading from the Naktong to the Yongsan-Miryang MSR, and supply convoys moving toward the front were warned to be alert for snipers. Otherwise, no special precautions were taken to safeguard either the division headquarters complex at Kyun'gyo or its lines of communication to the front. The 24th Division command structure believed it had finally caught up with the enemy, but events would soon show it still to be operating at least twelve hours behind the North Koreans.⁴⁷

The Fight for the MSR

5



Dawn of 11 August marked the opening of a new phase in the 24th Division's fight to maintain its position along the Naktong. The failure of the individual regiments to erase the North Korean penetration had caused General Church to create Task Force Hill in an attempt to produce a more united effort. Hill's staff worked through the predawn hours planning a coordinated attack by the seven infantry battalions engaged in the Bulge. Central to the plan was a sweep by the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, to the northwest behind Obong-ni Ridge, a movement that the planners believed would roll up the North Korean right flank.¹ Unfortunately, before the day was over, this ambitious plan would have to be cast aside. An excellent proposal had it been implemented several days earlier, the plan now had been overtaken by events occurring south of Yongsan. There, North Korean units were on the verge of reaching the 24th Division's MSR. This threat, which grew by the hour, would soon replace Task Force Hill's operations as the division's primary concern and would remain so for several days.

Task Force Hill's initial attack was not scheduled to begin until 1200, but activity on the southern front began at first light. At Namji-ri, Lt. Col. Gordon Murch pushed Companies E and G of his 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry, across the Naktong, where they joined Company F in its bridgehead north of the river. Having secured Namji-ri, Murch began an advance up the road toward Yongsan. The road, passing through a wide floodplain, initially paralleled the Naktong on the right. Murch deployed Company F on the road, with Company G on its left, and Company E echeloned to the left rear to cover the battalion's open flank. One mile north of Namji-ri, a heavily diked stream crossed the road before emptying into the Naktong, and there Murch found the enemy. Firing from behind the dike, North Korean machine gunners pinned the leading platoons of Company F to the ditches on either side of the road. Murch called for artillery support from Battery B, 8th Field Artillery Battalion, which was supporting him from south of the river. He also requested an air strike on the enemy position. Under the cover provided by these diversions, Company G gained access to the dike west of the North Korean gunners and began to sweep down upon their flank. Abandoning their position in response to this threat, the North Koreans fled northward under a rain of shells from Battery B. By noon,

Murch's men had occupied the dike and were cautiously probing beyond it (see map 10).²

Several miles north of Murch, events were not unfolding so happily for the 24th Division. Primary defender of the two roads leading south from Yongsan was the 24th Recon Company with its handful of M-24 tanks. Capt. John A. Kearns had detailed his 2d Platoon to work its way southward on the easternmost road, while his other two platoons covered the direct road to Namji-ri. All elements left their blocking positions at dawn and headed south. On the east road, the 2d Platoon drove a party of North Koreans out of the village of Non-ni, but the enemy took up new positions on the hills to either side and prevented further movement. A mile to the southwest, the rest of the company was similarly held up just south of Tochon-ni. Under increasing fire from automatic weapons and antitank rifles, Kearns' platoons could go no farther without reinforcement.³

One and one-half miles west of the 24th Recon Company, Lieutenant Colonel Smith's 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, was in its assembly area preparing for the noon attack when it was suddenly overrun by a large force of North Koreans. Taken by surprise, the battalion suffered at least eight casualties and lost several trucks and weapons before the enemy disappeared into the hills. This occurred shortly after 0900, about the same time that Yongsan began to come under heavy artillery fire. Seemingly well directed, the barrage struck amidst the various headquarters and supply elements crowded into the built-up area. Hardest hit was the CP of the 24th Recon Company, which lost two men killed and five wounded. As the shelling continued, men who had access to vehicles began to evacuate the town.⁴

Around 1030, just as Kearns' two platoons south of Tochon-ni were preparing to assault North Korean positions in the hills above the road, a violent artillery barrage struck the Americans. Unnerved by the shelling, which probably came from Murch's artillery south of the Naktong, the platoons withdrew precipitately and did not halt until they were nearly a mile north of Yongsan. In the town itself, the North Korean artillery fire intensified, driving more rear echelon elements northward into the countryside. Battery B, 11th Field Artillery Battalion, and the CP of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion also came under the same fire, but they remained in place. Such was not the case with Battery B of the 13th Field Artillery Battalion a mile and one-half nearer the front. It was forced to displace closer to Yongsan because of enemy small-arms fire. By 1200, all the division's elements around Yongsan, in what had once been the relatively secure rear, were under some form of North Korean harassing fire.⁵

The problems in the rear notwithstanding, Task Force Hill launched its noon attack on schedule. With Smith's battalion shaken from its morning brush with the enemy, the main effort shifted to the 9th Infantry in the center of the line. While the 1st Battalion provided a base of fire from the vicinity of Hill 165, the 2d Battalion advanced about 1,500 yards across a valley to the foothills on the right of the Yongsan-Naktong road. This advance, made against light enemy resistance, recovered most of the ground

lost on the previous day. On the 9th Infantry's left, A and B Companies of the 34th Infantry also moved forward slightly. Such was not the case on the front of the 19th Infantry, holding Task Force Hill's right. There, the 1st Battalion was charged with covering the 9th Infantry's right flank by an advance of its own. Depleted by casualties, stragglers, and heat exhaustion, however, the battalion could only hold its position, despite pleas for aid from the exposed 9th Infantry (see map 10).⁶

While Task Force Hill struggled to make small gains, four miles to the rear at Yongsan, the situation continued to deteriorate. The only part of Kearns' 24th Recon Company still guarding the southern approaches to the town was the 2d Platoon near Non-ni. At 1430, fire from North Korean antitank rifles set one of the platoon's tanks ablaze and destroyed the platoon leader's vehicle. As the enemy began to outflank his command, 2d Lt. J. L. Bragg ordered it to withdraw to the southern edge of Yongsan. There the platoon was reformed by Captain Kearns, who used it to establish a new blocking position just south of town. Kearns then went in search of the remainder of his company.⁷

At 1755, Colonel Beauchamp informed Colonel Snee, the division G3, that he believed Yongsan's fall was only a few hours away and that all available troops had been committed. Another message sent at 1845 reported that enemy pressure against Yongsan from the south was increasing. Shortly thereafter, the artillery batteries emplaced 1,000 yards west of Yongsan came under North Korean small-arms fire. Battery B, 13th Field Artillery, which had already moved once because of enemy harassment, turned one of its howitzers around and fired a round toward suspected enemy positions in its rear. The artillerymen also sprayed the area with 40-mm and machine gun fire, temporarily ending the threat as the enemy faded back into the broken country to the south.⁸

All around Yongsan similar encounters took place between surprised American soldiers and North Korean infiltrators. Such was the fate of a motor patrol from Headquarters Company of the 9th Infantry. Ambushed by infiltrators, the patrol extricated itself only when one of its members, Pfc. Lawrence Y. Bater, remained behind to provide covering fire. The patrol escaped, but Bater did not. When his body was discovered several days later surrounded by enemy dead, it was evident that he had sold his life dearly. Because his "heroic and selfless action resulted in the successful withdrawal of his comrades," Private First Class Bater posthumously received the Distinguished Service Cross.⁹

Quick action was necessary to bring more troops to the defense of Yongsan, but the sources from which to draw fresh units were rapidly being depleted. At 1905, General Church once more called upon Col. Richard Stephens' 21st Infantry. Church ordered Stephens to send a company to Yongsan as rapidly as possible. Since the telephone line from Kyun'gyo to Stephens' CP was dead, the message was dispatched by light plane and dropped to the 21st at 1940. By the time a similar message arrived ten minutes later, Stephens had already alerted the 14th Engineer (C) Battalion

and called its commanding officer to his CP. At 2000, Stephens ordered the 14th Engineers to send all available men to join Beauchamp at Yongsan. A liaison party left immediately and arrived at Yongsan, nine miles away, at 2030. It was followed by elements of Company A, augmented by cooks and staff section personnel from Headquarters and Service Company. This ad hoc collection of troops, numbering fewer than 100 men, reached Beauchamp's CP at 2115.¹⁰

The day ended with Yongsan still in American hands but shielded on the south and east by only a thin line of troops. Captain Kearns had finally located the remainder of his recon company and had united them with his 2d Platoon on the southern approaches to the town. The detachment of the 14th Engineers sent by Colonel Stephens moved out on the MSR several miles east of Yongsan, where it established a series of roadblocks connected by a jeep patrol. Beyond the engineers, another ad hoc formation patrolled the MSR toward Kyun'gyo. Consisting of Capt. George Hafeman's 24th Division Headquarters Company and miscellaneous detachments from the 24th Military Police Company, 24th Signal Company, 24th Division Band, 724th Ordnance Maintenance Company, and South Korean police, this formation was given the name of Task Force Hafeman (see map 11).¹¹

Much of the North Korean pressure on Yongsan during 11 August was an indirect result of the advance northward of Lieutenant Colonel Murch's 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry. After forcing the enemy from the dike north of Namji-ri, Murch had spent several hours consolidating his position. At 1530, he began a slow drive northward toward Yongsan. As the advance compressed the North Korean access corridor into the 24th Division's rear, the enemy either moved toward Yongsan or dispersed into the hills and gullies on either side of Murch's axis of advance. Nightfall found the 2d Battalion moving onto the high ground west of the road from Yongsan to Namji-ri. Unfortunately, its isolated position made it vulnerable to enemy infiltration, causing Murch to withdraw his companies to the vicinity of the dike by 2300. Although a prudent move, this decision again widened the North Korean infiltration corridor (see map 10).¹²

The developing threat to the division's rear caused General Church on the night of 11 August to reorient the thrust of the 24th Division's counter-attack. Although he was still determined to reduce the North Korean bridgehead in the Naktong Bulge, the security of the division's MSR had now become his first priority. Accordingly, Task Force Hill was ordered to cease offensive operations and stand on the defensive until further notice. To deal with the threat to Yongsan from the south, the remainder of the 27th Infantry was instructed to join Murch's 2d Battalion in its drive north toward Yongsan, thereby isolating the North Korean infiltrators. Until the 27th could accomplish its mission, security of the MSR depended upon three small units, the 24th Recon Company, Company A of the 14th Engineer (C) Battalion, and Task Force Hafeman.¹³

Although the 24th Division's predicament on the night of 11 August was not yet catastrophic, the potential for disaster was great enough to influence the actions of even those division elements far in the rear. Having

been engaged in an almost continuous retrograde movement for the past month, the 24th Division's rear echelons were by now well attuned to even the subtlest indicators presaging another retreat. The all too familiar signs were now reappearing, and prudent soldiers acted accordingly. The division medical officer, noting the threat to the MSR, began to rearrange the location of his clearing platoons. War correspondents, who previously had had free access to the division's G2 and G3 sections, now were summarily excluded and henceforth would receive information only through briefings conducted by the division's public affairs officer. At Miryang, site of the division's rear headquarters and railhead, the division's finance section began to arrange for the evacuation of its cash reserve and military pay records. As yet there was no panic, but the men of the 24th Division had once more begun to look over their shoulders. If not arrested quickly, this tendency could escalate into a problem of massive proportions.¹⁴

Adding to the 24th Division's woes on the night of 11 August was a report from Eighth Army at 2150 that the North Koreans had pushed another force across the Naktong, this time just beyond the division's northern flank. The sectors held by the 21st Infantry and Task Force Hyzer on the division's right had been relatively quiet for several days, enabling Church to reduce troop strength there in order to reinforce more threatened areas to the south. An infantry battalion, an engineer company, and a 155-mm artillery battery had all moved to Yongsan from the division's right within the past twenty-four hours. Thus, no units were immediately available to respond to the new threat. Lieutenant Colonel Hyzer of the 3d Engineer (C) Battalion, responsible for the 24th Division's right flank, sent a seventeen-man patrol across the Naktong during the night in hopes of discovering the enemy's intentions, but it would be at least a day before an answer could be obtained. Beyond that, no action could be taken, and Eighth Army was so informed.¹⁵

By midnight of 11–12 August, the pitifully small number of troops available for the defense of the MSR had all been deployed. Normally, trucks and ambulances moving between the division railhead at Miryang and the forward units near Yongsan had a tortuous journey of almost twenty miles along a narrow, twisting, frequently one-lane dirt road. From Miryang, the road ran westward through mountains for five miles before dropping into the valley of a small stream. Once in the valley, the road turned southward for another five miles, passing through several villages en route. Along this section were located the rear headquarters of some of the divisional units and several medical detachments. At the village of Kyun'gyo, site of the 24th Division's forward headquarters, the MSR turned west and headed for Yongsan, nine miles away. Quickly enveloped by the hills, the road surmounted two passes, located two and five miles respectively west of Kyun'gyo. Beyond the second pass, the road traversed the bottom of a narrow valley for three miles until it intersected the Tochon-ni to Yongsan road, one-half mile south of Yongsan (see map 11).¹⁶

Inadequate as it was, the road through Kyun'gyo was the sole route capable of meeting the logistical requirements of the 24th Division. The

only other road from Miryang to Yongsan was an even more circuitous track of over forty miles that could not possibly handle the division's traffic. In addition to the supply trucks moving westward and the ambulances moving eastward, the section of the MSR from Kyun'gyo to Yongsan was also the right-of-way for the telephone lines connecting division headquarters with the combat units at the front. Any prolonged break in the MSR would have catastrophic consequences for the 24th Division. Ammunition and food stocks would be depleted, casualties would not be able to reach hospitals, and wire communications links between General Church and his maneuver elements would be severed. Thus, the rutted dirt road that served as the 24th Division's lifeline had to be protected at all costs.¹⁷

Because of the division's weakened condition, only the three and one-half mile section of the MSR nearest Yongsan was guarded. On this stretch, traffic passed through a series of small posts manned by men from diverse units. The first position, on the outskirts of Yongsan itself, was held by the men of Captain Kearns' 24th Recon Company. The next mile and one-half was guarded by a detachment of the 14th Engineer (C) Battalion. Consisting of about 100 men drawn from Company A and the battalion's Headquarters and Service Company, this force was by no means a cohesive combat unit. Its unit integrity was further degraded by the manner in which it had been deployed. Four separate positions were established at roughly 800-yard intervals: from west to east, Post 1 under Lieutenant Henderson with seventeen men, Post 2 under Lieutenant Moore with fifteen men, Post 3 under Lieutenant McMillan with twenty-four men, and Post 4 under Lieutenant Martin with twenty-five men. A five-man jeep patrol under Corporal Hurst connected the four posts with Captain Gass' CP in Yongsan. The battalion commander, Major Miller, stationed himself in Yongsan as well.¹⁸

Five hundred yards beyond Engineer Post 4 lay the segment of the MSR guarded by Task Force Hafeman. This ad hoc force was an even more varied collection of detachments than the engineers, consisting of men from at least six different units. Capt. Hafeman had only 135 men, some of them volunteers, like Pfc. Francis L. Baker of the 724th Ordnance Maintenance Company. Hafeman deployed most of his contingent in two strong-points: Post 1 at the hamlet of Simgong-ni and Post 2 at Wonjon Pass, 1,000 yards to the east. Both positions had jeeps and were well equipped with machine guns but were short of ammunition, hand grenades, and mortars. Behind Hafeman's men, the MSR was unprotected all the way to Kyun'gyo, except for the headquarters detachment of Battery A, 26th AAA (AW) Battalion, located three miles east of Hafeman's Post 2.¹⁹

The first half of the night of 11–12 August was relatively quiet. Vehicles traveling on the MSR moved only in groups of two or more, since North Korean infiltrators were known to be in the area. The only sign of their presence, however, was a series of random shots by snipers, one of which killed a man at Hafeman's Post 2 just before midnight. During the first hour of 12 August, Corporal Hurst of the 14th Engineers led a jeep patrol out to Engineer Post 4 without encountering any enemy. Hurst's patrol returned to Yongsan at 0115 and fifteen minutes later began another trip

eastward. On this run, Hurst met two ambulances en route to Yongsan. The ambulances arrived safely at 0140 and picked up several wounded men for the return trip to Miryang. There was no indication that the trip would be other than uneventful.²⁰

Filled with patients, the two vehicles of the 1st Ambulance Platoon departed Yongsan around 0200, passing through the roadblock of the 24th Recon Company and Engineer Posts 1 and 2 without incident. Ahead of them, Corporal Hurst's jeep patrol neared Engineer Post 4, its turnaround point. Around 0220, between Engineer Posts 2 and 3, the two ambulances suddenly received heavy bursts of automatic weapons fire. The driver of the second ambulance was hit, and his vehicle careened into the ditch. Two medics ran back up the road to warn Engineer Post 2. Rather than continue into the fire, the first ambulance turned around, hastily loaded the passengers and patients of the other vehicle aboard, and headed back toward Yongsan. Halting briefly at Lieutenant Moore's Engineer Post 2, the ambulance continued westward, raising the alarm at the 24th Recon's roadblock along the way. Moore sent a corporal following it in a 2 1/2-ton truck to inform Major Miller of the incident. Although the truck driver was unable to locate Miller's CP in the darkness, he did alert Lieutenant Henderson's Engineer Post 1 as he passed it.²¹

At the other end of the engineers' line, Corporal Hurst had just begun his return patrol. Unaware of the fate of the ambulances, he and his men drove blindly into the North Korean ambush. When Hurst's driver was hit, the jeep stopped in the road. Dragging the wounded man under the jeep, Hurst and two others took cover, while another soldier raced to warn Lieutenant Moore's Engineer Post 2. By the time his warning was delivered at 0330, it was superfluous. When Hurst's jeep patrol did not return on schedule, two lieutenants from the 14th's headquarters detachment drove out to Lieutenant Henderson's Engineer Post 1 to learn the cause. When they arrived, Henderson, hearing the small-arms fire up ahead, advised them not to go forward until daybreak. By this time, word had already reached Yongsan that the MSR had been cut by fire about a mile and one-half out of town.

At 0520, about an hour before sunrise, Lieutenant Martin's Engineer Post 4 came under heavy fire from North Korean riflemen and machine gunners. When the fire did not diminish after several hours, Martin concluded that his twenty-five men were in danger of being trapped. Accordingly, he rashly split his force in an effort to escape. Sergeant Churchill and most of the men were told to make their way east to join Task Force Hafeman's Post 1, while Martin and two NCOs headed for Lieutenant McMillan's Engineer Post 3. McMillan's position meanwhile had come under attack at 0600 by North Koreans who had crawled within grenade range under the cover of darkness. After a grenade explosion wounded McMillan and several others, Sergeant Kavetsky, the ranking NCO, decided to lead eight men in a dash for Moore's Post 2. So fierce was the North Korean fire that all except Kavetsky were shot down. Kavetsky dived into a rice paddy near the road to escape from the searching enemy fire. From his hiding place, he saw Lieutenant Martin's party drive up to the abandoned

Post 3, come under fire, and be taken prisoner. Both Engineer Posts 3 and 4 had now fallen to the North Koreans (see map 11).²²

East of the engineers, Task Force Hafeman participated in the action. North Koreans estimated to be in company strength opened fire on Hafeman Post 1 at 0630, cutting it off from Hafeman Post 2. Better supplied with communications gear than the engineers, Hafeman maintained radio contact with the beleaguered Post 1 until 0700, when the link failed. Pending re-establishment of communications, Hafeman sent a detail to the rear for additional small-arms ammunition, hand grenades, and an 81-mm mortar. When radio contact was restored at 0730, he learned that Post 1 had sustained three casualties. Rather than passively await events, Hafeman at 0830 decided to try to break the enemy's stranglehold on Post 1. He ordered three jeeps to make a dash from Post 1 to Post 2. Armed with .50-caliber machine guns and BARs, the jeeps set out at 0900.

Braving the enemy's automatic weapons fire, the small convoy fought its way to Hafeman Post 2 at Wonjon Pass. The convoy arrived at 0935, having suffered three casualties. One of the machine guns had been damaged, one of the jeeps had been shot up, and another had lost a tire. Nevertheless, the convoy had survived, and its leader believed he had inflicted some damage on the enemy. At 1000, the ammunition and grenades requested earlier by Hafeman arrived at Post 2. Hafeman loaded them in the jeeps and at 1005 dispatched the vehicles back to Post 1. The convoy again passed through the gauntlet of fire and delivered its cargo safely. Reinforced by Sergeant Churchill's detachment from Engineer Post 4 and resupplied with ammunition, Hafeman Post 1 was momentarily secure.²³

Back at Yongsan, supply vehicles and ambulances began to gather, waiting for the MSR to be cleared. There, they were threatened by North Korean infiltrators who had crossed the road in the engineer's sector and moved onto the hills overlooking Yongsan from the southeast. Some of them were spotted by the men of the 24th Recon Company, who drove the North Koreans back with mortar fire. Around 0800, forty-one men from Company B, 21st Infantry, retreated into the 24th Recon's position from southwest of Yongsan. Thankful for the reinforcements, Captain Kearns sent them to occupy the hills where the North Koreans had been seen. Indicative of the confused state of the fighting around the MSR, this intermingling of units and chains of command eroded cohesion at a time when unity of effort was essential. Aware of the problem, General Church, at 0845, ordered Colonel Hill to assume command of all units around Yongsan. Church further authorized Hill to withdraw an infantry company from the Naktong front and to use it to reopen the MSR. Preoccupied with the battle for the river line, Hill, in turn, delegated responsibility for clearing the MSR to Lt. Col. Charles Smith of the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry. Hill created Task Force Smith and transferred Company F of the 9th Infantry to Smith's control. Smith's own companies were already heavily involved with North Korean units southwest of Yongsan, so he would have to defend the town's southeastern perimeter with Kearns' Recon Company and the remnants of Company A, 14th Engineers, until reinforcements arrived. His most advanced

position was now Engineer Post 2, which was under heavy enemy fire from three directions.²⁴

For several hours, the lack of an offensive force to sweep the hills precluded any effort to reopen the MSR. Several attempts, however, were made to pass through the gauntlet of fire between Engineer Post 2 and the abandoned Posts 3 and 4. At 0900, 1st Lt. William Coghill, executive officer of the 24th Recon Company, and his communications chief, Sgt. James Keelen, attempted to reach Yongsan in a jeep from Miryang. At the North Korean roadblock, the jeep was struck by a 14.5-mm antitank round that caromed into Coghill's leg. Instead of taking cover, Coghill ordered Keelen to continue through the enemy fire in order to report personally what they had learned to Captain Kearns. For his actions that day, Coghill later received the Silver Star. No further attempt was made to enter the contested corridor until 1400, when an M-24 tank from Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion, was sent forward from Yongsan in an effort to rescue a wounded man trapped somewhere beyond Engineer Post 2. Although hit by 14.5-mm anti-tank rounds in a gas tank and an ammunition storage compartment, the tank searched unsuccessfully for the casualty, then returned to Yongsan. After that, the enemy's grip on the MSR remained unchallenged for several hours.²⁵

East of the North Korean blockade, Captain Hafeman received permission at 1330 to abandon his Post 1, but he delayed the attempt until the arrival of the mortar he had requested earlier. Unknown to Hafeman, a relief force was even then gathering at Yongsan to fight its way through to join him. He finally received the mortar at 1500 and emplaced it to cover the withdrawal of Post 1. Troops then were instructed to mount all automatic weapons on the remaining vehicles in order to provide cover for the foot soldiers as they withdrew. While these preparations were under way, the relief force could be seen advancing from the direction of Yongsan. This was Task Force Cody.

Captain Cody of Company F, 9th Infantry, had reached Yongsan around 1600 with one of his platoons. There, two rifle squads were loaded on three M-24 light tanks and two M-39 personnel carriers from Kearns' 24th Recon Company and sent forward to clear the roadblock. As this force made its way beyond Engineer Post 2, Sergeant Kavetsky rose from his hiding place in a rice paddy and scrambled aboard one of the M-39s. Kavetsky was unscathed, but another soldier, who attempted the same thing a few yards farther down the road, was killed by North Korean fire. Eventually, Task Force Cody reached Hafeman's Post 1, which was then being abandoned. Cody's men joined Hafeman's detachment as well as Sergeant Churchill's survivors from Engineer Post 4, and together they rolled out of Hafeman Post 1 in a hail of enemy bullets. At 1705, the convoy reached relative safety at Hafeman Post 2 in Wonjon Pass, having lost one man killed on the way. Although Task Force Cody had instructions to return to Yongsan, Brigadier General Menoher, Church's representative on the scene, ordered it to remain with Hafeman.²⁶



M-39 armored utility vehicle, one of the 24th Division vehicles destroyed in the First Battle of the Naktong Bulge

At 1800, Hafeman reorganized his command. Besides men from headquarters, signal, MP, band, and ordnance detachments, he now commanded detachments from both Company F, 9th Infantry, and the 24th Recon Company. Sending the military policemen to rejoin their parent unit, Hafeman decided to withdraw nearer to Kyun'gyo. Leaving five outposts on the hills overlooking Wonjon Pass, he fell back with the remainder of his force almost three miles to another pass just west of Kyun'gyo. Hafeman then was ordered to division headquarters to brief officers from the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, which would attempt to reopen the MSR on the following day. In its share of the day's fight, Task Force Hafeman had lost one man killed and ten wounded. Dead was Pfc. Francis Baker of the 724th Ordnance Maintenance Company, a young soldier who had voluntarily left his safe job in the rear to help reopen the division's MSR.²⁷

As darkness approached, the Americans at both ends of the MSR consolidated their positions. In Yongsan, Lieutenant Colonel Smith allowed the remnants of Company A, 14th Engineers, to withdraw from Engineer Posts 1 and 2. Major Miller's battered engineers were sent to a hill northeast of Yongsan, where they dug in for the night. In their defense of the MSR, they had suffered twenty-three men killed, four wounded, and three missing. Near sunset at 2030, an M-24 tank from Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion, joined a tank and personnel carrier from the 24th Recon Company in making a final attempt to run the enemy blockade. The elements from the recon company successfully dashed through the enemy fire in the gathering darkness, but the other tank turned around and returned to Yongsan. At 2100, Captain Cody brought the remainder of Company F, 9th Infantry, into the lines southeast of the town to fill gaps in the position held by the 24th Recon Company. As the men dug in, North Korean artillery pounded their position. No one was hit, but four jeeps were damaged. On the MSR, at least 6,000 yards of road were in enemy hands (see map 12).²⁸

The failure to clear the MSR seriously hindered the 24th Division in its fight to wrest the Naktong Bulge from the enemy. Because the road was blocked, casualties could not be promptly evacuated to Miryang, which overtaxed the limited facilities in the Yongsan-Ch'angnyong area. Additional medical support was sent forward, but it had to take the roundabout route via Ch'ongdo. A much more serious consequence for the division was the loss of the telephone lines laid along the MSR between division headquarters and the front. Deprived of this wire link, Church and his staff were forced to rely upon an inadequate radio net or on messages dropped from light observation planes. Radio messages had first to be encoded, then transmitted, and finally decoded—a process that increased the average time between dispatch and receipt to three and one-half hours. Thus, General Church lacked an accurate picture of events in the division sector for much of the day.²⁹

Indicative of the disruption caused by the blocked MSR was the difficulty encountered by Colonel Hill in attending a conference at division headquarters at Kyun'gyo. At 1015, Hill was told to go to the airstrip at Ch'angnyong, where a plane would be waiting to fly him over the North Korean blockade to Church's CP. At 1245, Hill responded that he would be at Ch'angnyong at 1330. This message was so delayed in transit that division headquarters was still waiting for Hill's answer over an hour later. Without this confirmation, no plane could be sent. At 1450, Hill was still awaiting transportation at the Ch'angnyong airstrip. Eventually, the plane arrived and transported Hill over the roadblock without incident. At Kyun'gyo, he found not only General Church but also General Walker of Eighth Army. According to Hill, Walker wanted to know if Hill's troops could clear the MSR, to which Hill responded affirmatively. Hill's answer notwithstanding, Walker gave Church still another of his dwindling reserve assets, the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry of the 2d Infantry Division. This unit, together with the 27th Infantry advancing from the south, would be assigned to secure the road from Kyun'gyo to Yongsan.³⁰

Although the fight for the MSR occupied most of the 24th Division's attention on 12 August, there was activity on other fronts as well. Standing on the defensive, the regiments comprising Task Force Hill made only slight adjustments in their lines. Meanwhile, they fended off numerous small attacks by the North Koreans, who continually probed the American positions for weak spots. Near the Naktong, Col. Ned Moore of the 19th Infantry requested and received an airdrop of propaganda leaflets on the North Korean lines, but there was no immediate indication of its effectiveness. Back at Yongsan, the near approach of the enemy caused several artillery batteries and unit CPs, including that of Beauchamp's 34th Infantry, to displace northward a short distance. Behind them, the road to Ch'angnyong became clogged with the traffic diverted from the MSR. In the midst of it all, the medical detachments of the 21st Infantry struggled to cope with the increasing number of casualties arriving both from the Naktong front and the action on the MSR.³¹

Another worrisome sector was the division's northern flank, where Eighth Army had identified a new enemy bridgehead east of the Naktong. Before dawn, Eighth Army analysts concluded that the crossing either was inconsequential or had been repulsed, but Church, nevertheless, cautioned Stephens' 21st Infantry and the engineers of Task Force Hyzer to be on their guard. At 0500, five survivors of the seventeen-man patrol Hyzer had sent across the Naktong the previous night returned to the east bank. They told of being attacked by large numbers of the enemy, escaping only when their wounded leader, Lt. Ward Neville, sacrificed himself in a delaying action. This report indicated considerable North Korean strength on Hyzer's right front. At 0735, the 21st Infantry's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon, patrolling east of the Naktong, was ambushed by North Koreans near the village of Hyonp'ung. The platoon escaped, but at the cost of one man wounded and one jeep destroyed. Stephens' men estimated North Korean strength at two companies, but elements of Task Force Hyzer placed the number at battalion size, and a patrol from the 1st Cavalry Division believed a regiment had crossed. Taking no chances, Stephens repeatedly requested the return of his 1st Battalion, but on each occasion, Church demurred.³²

Left to their own devices, Stephens and Lieutenant Colonel Hyzer of the 3d Engineer (C) Battalion redeployed their limited assets to meet the new threat. With the division's right flank thinly held, an enemy penetration in strength could quickly reach the north-south road from Hyonp'ung through Ch'angnyong to Yongsan. Therefore, Hyzer ordered two of his four companies to block the road and relocated both his CP and his Service Company in more sheltered positions. Stephens withdrew his only uncommitted unit, Company C, from behind the river positions and placed it in mobile reserve near the regimental CP. Battery B of the 63d Field Artillery Battalion, which was in the area undergoing reconstitution, now turned its six 105-mm howitzers northward. Similarly, a 155-mm tube of Battery A, 11th Field Artillery Battalion, was also traversed to cover Hyonp'ung. Both Stephens and Hyzer established observation posts to watch for any North Korean forward movement, and after dark, the artillery directed unobserved fire on the area of the crossing point (see map 13).³³

Well aware of the risks he and Hyzer were running, Stephens could only await the enemy's next move. With Task Force Hill locked in combat on the ridges west of Yongsan and the division's MSR momentarily severed, Stephens could expect no more divisional assets from Church. Indeed, normal communications links with division headquarters still had not been restored, and he was similarly out of touch with the 1st Cavalry Division to the north. Stephens, who previously had considered the morale of his unit to be good, now downgraded it to fair. In his unit report submitted at 1700, he explained the revision was "due to [his unit] covering a 10 mile river front with four depleted companies and knowing unit covering right of Division had one platoon to patrol a 10 mile front in which the river can be crossed by wading—which happened last night by at least 2 Battalions of Enemy."³⁴

From the perspective of General Church at Kyun'gyo, the 24th Division, on the night of 12 August, had a relatively stable front, a potential threat on its right, and a crisis on its MSR. Obviously, the Kyun'gyo-Yongsan road had to be reopened and the pressure on Yongsan reduced before another drive could be mounted to regain the ground lost in the Naktong Bulge. With the 24th Division's own resources already fully committed, General Walker first had given Church Col. John Michaelis' 27th Infantry, then he added Lt. Col. Clair Hutchin's 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry. Michaelis' 1st and 3d Battalions had joined his 2d Battalion north of Namji-ri by 1100, and at 1440, the regiment was formally but temporarily attached to the 24th Division. Church planned to use the 27th Infantry to sweep the enemy from the region south and east of Yongsan. To provide a secure jumping-off point, the 2d Battalion, at 1930, reoccupied the high ground it had taken and abandoned on the previous day. Meanwhile, Hutchin's battalion, during the night, relieved Task Force Hafeman in the hills west of Kyun'gyo. Both Michaelis and Hutchin prepared to advance toward Yongsan on the next morning.³⁵

Holding his 1st Battalion in reserve around Namji-ri, Colonel Michaelis sent his 3d Battalion forward on the Yongsan road at 0930 on 13 August. At 1100, it came abreast of the 2d Battalion, holding the high ground west of the road. Both battalions then drove toward Yongsan, sweeping the enemy before them. Supporting the advance were Battery B, 8th Field Artillery Battalion, and tanks from Company C, 73d Tank Battalion. Michaelis' men encountered only small groups of the enemy, and these were easily destroyed or forced to disperse into the hills. As the battalions advanced, patrols from the regimental Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon maintained contact between them and probed toward the MSR east of Yongsan. On the left, the 2d Battalion made contact with the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, southwest of Yongsan, then advanced to the town at 1500. On its right, the 3d Battalion moved more slowly into the hills southwest of Yongsan, searching for the elusive North Koreans. It reached the MSR at 1630 and two hours later made contact with the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, at Simgong-ni (see map 13).³⁶

Because of the nature of the terrain traversed, the advance of Lieutenant Colonel Hutchin's 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, along the MSR was much more arduous than that of Michaelis' 27th Infantry. Hutchin deployed Company C on the ridges south of the road, Company B on the ridges north of the road, and Company A on the MSR itself. Supported by a tank platoon, Company A advanced easily, but the companies on the hills above found the going extremely difficult. Scheduled to begin at 0500, the advance was delayed until the flank companies reached their start positions on the ridges overlooking the road. Part of Company B did not arrive at its line of departure until 1000. Unfamiliarity with the terrain led the battalion's officers to misidentify some objectives and overlook shorter routes to others. Unprepared for the heat and humidity of a Korean August and poorly conditioned for hill climbing, the men struggled slowly from one ridge to the next. Few North Koreans were seen, and even fewer were engaged as the

battalion inched ahead. The lack of enemy contact, in fact, led at least one officer to conclude that the 24th Division had been frightened unnecessarily by only a handful of the enemy. Finally, at 1330, the battalion's leading elements debouched from Wonjon Pass and reached the village of Simgong-ni, where they encountered a patrol from the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon of the 27th Infantry. While the battalion consolidated its position at Simgong-ni, Lieutenant Colonel Hutchin led a patrol into Yong-san, where he conferred with Colonel Hill. The battalion had lost only one man to enemy action, but nine were evacuated because of heat exhaustion.³⁷

Although Michaelis and Hutchin had not located the North Koreans that had cut the MSR, General Church believed there was no time to mount an all-out search for them in the rough terrain paralleling the road. Accordingly, he ordered the 27th Infantry to return to the vicinity of Namji-ri. By the end of the day, Michaelis' 2d and 3d Battalions had been moved by truck to rejoin the 1st Battalion at Namji-ri, where the regiment reverted to Eighth Army reserve. Similarly, most of the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, was withdrawn to the vicinity of the 24th Division's headquarters at Kyun'gyo. Company A, reinforced by two tanks, remained behind to guard Wonjon Pass and patrol the MSR. Although sufficient to keep the MSR open, this force was unable to prevent small parties of North Koreans from harassing convoys and wire crews on the road during the night. Nevertheless, the threat to the 24th Division's MSR had been effectively removed. Its mission accomplished, Task Force Hafeman was dissolved.³⁸

With the threat to its supply lines resolved, the only remaining obstacle to an early resumption of the 24th Division's counterattack in the Naktong Bulge was the new North Korean crossing north of the division's right at Hyonp'ung. In midafternoon, General Church visited Colonel Stephens of the 21st Infantry at the latter's CP. Stephens outlined the limited precautions taken by his depleted regiment, now consisting of only one weak battalion, one additional infantry company, and two companies of engineers. North of Stephens, only the four engineer companies of Task Force Hyzer stood between the 24th Division's rear and the estimated 900 North Koreans at Hyonp'ung. Neither Stephens nor Hyzer had been able to contact major elements of the 1st Cavalry Division, in whose sector the North Koreans had originally crossed, nor did they know the location of any of the 1st Cavalry's units in the vicinity.³⁹

Upon returning to his own headquarters at Kyun'gyo, Church learned that Eighth Army had decided to expand the 24th Division's area of operations northward to include the Hyonp'ung crossing site. Church passed this unwelcome news to Stephens shortly after 2000, following it with an order for Stephens to assume responsibility for the new area at once. Task Force Hyzer was attached to Stephens, but since it was already deployed in the affected area, this represented no reinforcement for the hard-pressed 21st Infantry. Church also ordered Stephens to conduct a reconnaissance around Hyonp'ung to determine the North Korean strength and intentions there. A patrol from Hyzer's Company D had already penetrated Hyonp'ung several

hours earlier but had been driven out by friendly artillery fire. Hyzer prepared a new effort for the following day and meanwhile guarded the road southward from Hyonp'ung as best he could. Surprisingly, the North Koreans at Hyonp'ung remained quiescent. For Stephens and Hyzer, this was the only bright spot in an otherwise gloomy situation.⁴⁰

During the fight to clear the 24th Division's rear on 13 August, Task Force Hill stood on the defensive and attempted to hold its ground around Yongsan. Each regiment sustained furious North Korean assaults before sunrise and again after nightfall. On Hill's right, the brunt of the North Korean attacks fell upon the 1st Battalion of the 19th Infantry. Company C was assailed twice but repulsed the enemy each time, capturing weapons and a prisoner. On its left, Company B defended its positions against four enemy assaults. There, a ravine leading into the left rear of the company allowed the North Koreans to penetrate the defenses. A firefight then ensued at ranges under thirty yards. In one section of the perimeter, the fighting was literally hand-to-hand. Only after the company called down 81-mm mortar fire nearly on its own positions was the perimeter restored. Four hours after their initial assault, the North Koreans withdrew to the opposing ridge.⁴¹

To the left of the 19th Infantry, the 1st and 2d Battalions of the 9th Infantry repelled three North Korean attacks in the early hours of 13 August, but the cost was high. Enemy fire felled 140 men, and an additional 59 were evacuated as nonbattle casualties, most suffering from heat exhaustion. Officer losses were especially heavy. One unit, Company E of the 2d Battalion, lost all of its officers on five separate occasions during this period of the battle. Each time, M. Sgt. Warren H. Jordon assumed command of the company and led it successfully, actions that ultimately brought him a battlefield commission. According to the unit report, the combat efficiency of the 9th Infantry remained high, although the adjacent 19th Infantry reported disturbingly that the 9th's 1st Battalion was too exhausted to remove its own dead.⁴²

South of the 9th Infantry, the 1st Battalion of the 34th Infantry also was caught up in the general North Korean attack sweeping across the front of Task Force Hill. After repulsing one enemy assault, Company B was driven back 200 yards by a second but was able to stabilize its position with the aid of Company A. Two miles to the south, Companies K and L began to withdraw from their exposed position on the Naktong under cover of the nearby 27th Infantry. This withdrawal, ordered by Colonel Beauchamp with the approval of the task force commander, was an effort to consolidate the scattered units of the 34th Infantry. When Colonel Michaelis of the 27th Infantry objected, however, General Church canceled the movement. Beauchamp protested, but the two companies remained a while longer in their isolated position, where they exerted little or no effect on the battle.⁴³

Behind the Naktong front, Yongsan's defenders made limited attacks on the morning of 13 August in an effort to drive North Korean infiltrators from the high ground overlooking the town and the MSR. Task Force Cody, composed of most of Company F, 9th Infantry, and a platoon of Company

B, 21st Infantry, attacked a hill southeast of Yongsan in midmorning. Cody's men received fire support from both the 24th Recon Company to the west and Company A, 14th Engineers, to the north. During the advance, a mortar round from the heavy weapons platoon of Company F fell short, killing two men and wounding four others. Fortunately, enemy resistance was light and the position was secured by late afternoon. Arrival of the 27th Infantry and the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, completed the relief of Yongsan, freeing several units from the composite force that had defended it. Company A, 78th Heavy Tank Battalion, was finally allowed to send its two battered M-24 tanks to the rear for much needed repairs. After some confusion, the remnants of Company A, 14th Engineer (C) Battalion, were also released and permitted to return to their parent unit north of Ch'angnyong. Essentially an orphaned unit in a confused situation, this company had been badly placed and poorly supervised during the defense of the MSR. As a result, it had been decimated.⁴⁴

During the day, while the fighting raged throughout the division's entire area of operations, senior officers met to plan the resumption of counterattacks by Task Force Hill. First, Colonel Hill conferred with his regimental commanders, Beauchamp and Moore. Then, while he drove to meet General Church at the Ch'angnyong airstrip, the regimental commanders held planning sessions with their battalion commanders and staffs. The result of these meetings was a plan calling for a coordinated attack by the 19th, 9th, and parts of the 34th and 21st Infantry regiments to begin at 0630 on 14 August. As before, the objective of the counterattack was the complete elimination of the North Korean bridgehead. The counterattack was to be supported by air strikes from 100 aircraft as well as by all of the artillery batteries within range. Yongsan would be protected by elements of the 24th Recon Company and an engineer detachment. The 24th Recon Company was also charged with maintaining liaison with the 27th Infantry around Namji-ri.⁴⁵

As night fell, General Church could look upon the events of 13 August with some satisfaction. The division's MSR had been secured, North Korean attacks on the division's front had been turned back, and Task Force Hill was preparing to resume its counterattacks. Still, there were worrisome problems facing the 24th Division. Wire communications forward from Church's headquarters at Kyun'gyo was still nonexistent, a situation only partially remedied by a second radio net established by the 24th Signal Company. Ammunition for the division's 4.2-inch and 81-mm mortars was in critically short supply, as were illuminating rounds of all calibers. Although the logistical system was at last forwarding an adequate supply of weapons, few replacements had arrived to replenish the division's depleted battalions. By its own estimate, Church's command had a combat efficiency rating of only 52 percent, with some individual units reckoned at no more than 20 percent. Worst of all, there was disquieting information from a prisoner that a fresh regiment of the North Korean 4th Division had just joined the battle. Aerial observation had noted a suspicious set of ramps on both sides of the Naktong at the tip of the Bulge, and one of the forward

units had reported the presence of an enemy tank east of the river. Church hoped that his counterattack planned for the following day would be the last one needed to restore his part of the Pusan Perimeter, but he also knew that the odds were not yet heavily in his favor.⁴⁶

The Failure of Task Force Hill

6



The counterattack scheduled to begin at 0630 on 14 August was envisioned by Task Force Hill's planners as a powerful drive that would carry all the way to the Nakdong, smashing the North Korean penetration and eliminating the bridgehead. According to Operations Order Number 5, all frontline units would participate in the advance, although more was expected of some units than others. On the task force's right, the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, would push forward to the village of Sinam-ni, while the 2d Battalion, to the north, retained its grip on the Nakdong shore. Still, these were secondary roles when compared with that assigned the 9th Infantry in Task Force Hill's center. That regiment was scheduled to send its two battalions forward on either side of the road running from the village of Tugok down to the Nakdong. North of the road, the 1st Battalion was assigned a series of hills as objectives, beginning with an extension of Hill 165. Known to the troops as Cloverleaf because of its distinctive shape on the operations maps, this hill had been in North Korean hands for much of the battle. South of the 1st Battalion, the initial objective of the 2d Battalion was the heights above Tugok. When that area was secured, the 2d Battalion would advance along the south side of the road and assault the north end of a long ridge known as Obong-ni. The south end of Obong-ni was the objective of the 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry. Like Cloverleaf, Obong-ni Ridge had long been in North Korean hands, and recent observation flights by light aircraft had revealed the enemy building field fortifications. Completing the attack plan, the 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, would sweep around the southern end of Obong-ni in a renewed effort to roll up the North Korean right flank.¹

Although they had been on the defensive for several days while the division's MSR was being cleared, the units comprising Task Force Hill were by no means rested. The grueling fighting of the previous eight days had taken its toll on the already depleted rifle companies, as had the heat and humidity of the Korean summer. Nightly North Korean probes and company-size assaults had also deprived the weary infantrymen of much needed rest during the recent defensive phase. With the flow of replacements at a low ebb, casualties had not been replaced, leaving rifle companies no larger than platoons in most regiments. The 19th and 34th Infantry regiments were especially weak, and even Hill's strongest unit, the 9th Infantry,

was gradually wasting away under the daily toll of losses. Knowing the weakness of the rifle companies, the planners hoped to compensate for the lack of infantry strength with increased employment of artillery and air support. Four full batteries of 105-mm and one of 155-mm howitzers were available to support the counterattack, with the bulk of the guns allotted to the 9th Infantry. Even more was expected from the aerial component. Eighth Army had assigned Task Force Hill first priority for air strikes on 14 August, a situation not previously attained and one that was quite ephemeral. This meant that up to 100 aircraft, both F-51s and F-80s, would be available for close air support, controlled from the task force CP. The staff of the 24th Division, in conjunction with the Air Force and the Eighth Army's Air Operations Center, had been working on the air plan for several days. It was hoped that this aerial assault would provide the momentum needed to carry the weary infantry to victory.²

Unfortunately, the work of the planners was partially negated by the weather. Between 0300 and 0400 on 14 August, rain began to fall in torrents. High winds sprang up, turning the downpour into driving sheets of water. The wind, rain, and low cloud ceiling forced postponement of the planned aerial bombardment. Nevertheless, the scheduled ten-minute artillery preparatory fires began on time. Shortly thereafter, the infantrymen struggled out of their water-filled foxholes and began to move forward through the rain. What the task force staff had intended to be a coordinated advance quickly lost cohesion and force as some units gained ground while others remained stalled at their lines of departure. Colonel Hill's early reports to General Church were quite optimistic, reflecting primarily the initial success of the 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, in gaining its first objective, the hill overlooking Tugok. Soon, however, less favorable reports began to arrive at Hill's headquarters just west of Yongsan. What had initially promised to be a rapid advance now mired down in a bitter fight for a few hundred yards of Korean terrain.³

As had so often been the case, the counterattack first began to disintegrate on the flanks, where the weakest units were deployed. On the task force's left, the 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry, successfully negotiated the small hills in its immediate front but was stopped in its tracks by the North Koreans entrenched on Obong-ni Ridge. The 34th Infantry, whose combat efficiency was judged to be no greater than 20 percent, could advance no farther. On its left, the 1st Battalion of the 21st Infantry moved forward from its position southwest of Yongsan to a new location on the left and rear of the 34th. It, too, was then halted by stiff enemy resistance, its goal of outflanking the North Korean line unachieved. The situation on the right of the task force was even worse. There, the 19th Infantry proved entirely unable to carry out its part of the plan. Reduced to only a handful of men by the previous week's fighting, the 2d Battalion did not attempt to advance at all during the day. On its left, the 1st Battalion had a key role to play in supporting the advance of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, to the south. Unwilling to move until the men of the 9th secured more of the Hill 165 complex, the 1st Battalion, 19th Infantry, remained in its original posi-

tions all morning. This failure to move as scheduled hindered the efforts of the 9th Infantry to take Cloverleaf. Free to concentrate on the 1st Battalion of the 9th, the North Koreans inflicted more than sixty casualties on that unit within an hour (see map 14).⁴

The failure of his 1st Battalion to participate in the counterattack prompted the regimental commander, Col. Ned Moore, to go forward to view the situation for himself. At 1010, he left regimental headquarters with his operations officer for the CP of the 1st Battalion. After explaining the situation, the battalion commander joined the party as they went forward to the company positions. As a result of Moore's intervention, Company A finally began to move in midafternoon. The company, which numbered only forty men, was aided in its advance by the progress of the 9th Infantry on its left. Supported by fire from Company B's positions on its right, Company A's handful of men moved into the hills north of the hamlet of Maekkok. While they did so, General Church arrived at the command post of the 19th Infantry to see for himself what was causing the delay. Satisfied that at last the regiment was in motion, Church departed after ten minutes without seeing Colonel Moore, who was still at the front with his battalion commander.⁵

During the afternoon of 14 August, the rain ceased to fall, although the low cloud ceiling remained until late in the day. Many flights had been canceled during the morning, but now aircraft began to operate over the counterattack area. Braving the poor flying conditions, pilots dropped through the overcast for the remainder of the day to deliver air strikes on the North Koreans tenaciously defending the reverse slopes of Obong-ni, Cloverleaf, and other hills. Artillery spotter planes also roamed the battlefield, directing fire missions against enemy concentrations. Beneficial as it was, this assistance came too late. By late afternoon, Task Force Hill's counterattack had ground to a halt almost everywhere. Company A of the 19th Infantry was still moving forward north of Maekkok, and part of the 9th Infantry was still battling its way up the slopes of Cloverleaf, but elsewhere the battered units of Task Force Hill were digging into the soggy earth, preparing defensive positions from which to face the inevitable North Korean counterattacks. The average gain for Task Force Hill during the day was only 500 yards. Elements of the 21st and 34th Infantry regiments on the left had fared slightly better, but most of the 19th Infantry had not moved at all. Everywhere, the North Koreans had skillfully defended the rugged terrain from reverse slope positions dug into the countless hills and ridges of the Bulge. They had suffered heavy losses, especially from the artillery and air strikes of the afternoon, but they had given up little ground and had inflicted equally serious losses on units of Task Force Hill.⁶

An ominous development in the day's fighting was the first intervention of North Korean armor in the area east of the Naktong River. There had been occasional reports of tank sightings earlier, but no tanks had been actually verified east of the river. The few sightings prior to 14 August had all been west of the Naktong, opposite the 21st Infantry. There, the tanks had usually fired a few rounds into the American defensive positions,

then clanked off into hiding for a while before repeating the process. On 14 August, however, there was no mistake—the North Koreans had somehow managed to get several tanks across the river into the Bulge. The first report of enemy armor came from the 19th Infantry, which radioed word of a tank in its sector at 1045. Attempts to destroy this tank with both air strikes and artillery fire throughout the day proved futile. At 1630, the tank fired into the position of Company B, calling forth another effort to neutralize it with artillery. Again, the tank was silenced only briefly, and it was back in action at 1800 against Company A. This time, a mortar barrage and another air strike were tried, all to no avail. As night fell, the beleaguered Company A, now down to twenty-five men, could hear North Koreans massing on the reverse slope of their hill for an attack. Under cover of darkness, the enemy filtered through a gap between Company A's advanced position and that of Company B, to the right rear. Shortly before 2200, the North Koreans assaulted the now isolated Company A and drove its few riflemen southward into the zone of the 9th Infantry, where they were pinned down by tank fire. Company A's retreat, thus, brought an end to Task Force Hill's counterattack on 14 August (see map 14).⁷

Elsewhere in the division sector, the situation remained stable. North of Task Force Hill, the 21st Infantry continued to hold its section of the river defenses and even managed to improve its minefields. A few North Koreans were sighted across the river, but artillery fire dispersed them whenever they gathered in sufficient numbers to justify a fire mission. During the day, the regiment received 289 replacements, most of whom were sent to the badly understrength 3d Battalion. This was the first significant number of replacements to join the 24th Division, and General Church had decided they should be assigned to either the 19th or 21st Infantry regiments. Although the 19th badly needed reinforcement, Church believed it imperative to bolster his northern flank against the North Korean force in the Hyonp'ung bridgehead. Surprisingly, the enemy unit that had crossed there continued to show little initiative. In order to maintain contact with the estimated two-battalion North Korean force, Colonel Stephens ordered the 3d Engineer (C) Battalion to patrol aggressively around Hyonp'ung. Since artillery fire from the 1st Cavalry Division was still periodically falling on the town, General Church requested its cessation. The 1st Cavalry Division agreed to halt its bombardment on the following day. Inexplicably, only the first part of this message was transmitted to the 21st Infantry, which ordered the 3d Engineers to send a patrol into the town. They did so, only to have it driven out at 1000 by friendly artillery fire. Other patrols later in the day were more successful, and one even returned with a wounded prisoner. This man, who belonged to the 10th North Korean Division, had been shot by his own squad leader when he proved unable to keep up. He indicated that the 10th Division was very weak and lacked heavy weapons, which possibly accounted for its relative inaction.⁸

The situation in the 24th Division's rear areas was decidedly improved on 14 August. Herculean labor by the 24th Signal Company at last restored wire communications between the division's headquarters at Kyun'gyo and

the units on the front lines. Companies K and L of the 34th Infantry finally received permission to withdraw from their exposed position on the southern edge of the Bulge and moved into regimental reserve. Two companies of the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, patrolled the MSR and adjacent trails, while the remainder of the battalion went into division reserve. In the south, the 27th Infantry crossed back into the sector of the 25th Division at Namji-ri shortly after noon. It was replaced by a company of the 35th Infantry, which took up positions just south of the Namji-ri bridge. Contact with this unit was maintained by patrols from the 24th Recon Company moving south from Yongsan. The North Korean force (estimated at battalion size) that had earlier cut the MSR had now disappeared into the jumble of hills and ridges on either side of the road. Church and his staff knew that they had not been destroyed, only dispersed, but neither the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, nor the 24th Recon Company could find them. With a battalion available to protect the MSR if necessary, Church resolved to continue Task Force Hill's counterattack on the following day. Even though his division's combat efficiency was estimated at only 52 percent by his staff, Church believed he had no other course of action available. His decision, thus, became part of Operations Instructions Number 23, issued at 2400 hours.⁹

In all but one particular, the plan for Task Force Hill's counterattack, scheduled for 15 August, was the same as that of the day before. The change involved Lt. Col. Charles Smith's 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry, on the task force's left. Smith's battalion no longer was expected to sweep around the southern end of Obong-ni Ridge and outflank the North Korean line. Instead, it received the much simpler mission of remaining in place to protect the task force's rear and left flank. But even this assignment proved impossible to accomplish as the North Koreans preempted the American counterattack by initiating one of their own shortly after midnight. The first blow fell on Smith's hapless battalion, which was soon engulfed by North Korean assaults from three sides. At 0230, with at least twenty of his men wounded, Smith called Colonel Hill and quietly requested permission to withdraw along the line of his communications wire. Hill later recalled that he responded: "You sound calm and perfectly all right to me. I hate to see you withdraw. On the other hand you are on the ground and should know best. I don't want to lose you. Think it over for half an hour and call me back." Smith reluctantly agreed, warning Hill not to initiate the call since the ringing of the field telephone might betray Smith's position to the North Koreans. At 0300, Smith again called Hill and again asked permission to withdraw since the situation had worsened. Reluctantly, Hill told Smith to bring his men back to safety. To cover their withdrawal and subsequent reorganization, Hill moved forward the 3d Battalion, 34th Infantry, itself numbering fewer than 300 men.¹⁰

As Smith's battalion fell back in disarray, North Korean assaults spread across the front of Task Force Hill. In the 19th Infantry's sector, the ubiquitous North Korean tank fired from close range into the positions of the 1st Battalion. Shells from the same or perhaps a second tank struck Company C of the 9th Infantry. Most serious of all, at 0300, four North Korean T-34

tanks crawled out of the darkness near the village of Tugok, turned onto the Yongsan road, and crashed through the position of the 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry. Seemingly unstoppable, the tanks rampaged through the battalion's immediate rear, crushing a jeep and shooting up several company supply points. Had the tanks continued eastward, they would have reached a succession of headquarters, including Task Force Hill's, as well as several artillery batteries. Fortunately, darkness, unfamiliarity with the terrain, and their pause to destroy supply dumps impeded their progress. Daylight found them deep within the American lines but still short of the vital targets nearer Yongsan.

While circuits buzzed throughout the sector raising the alarm, Cpl. Robert C. Carroll of Company H, 9th Infantry, took matters in his own hands. Obtaining a 3.5-inch rocket launcher, Carroll stealthily approached to within fifty yards of the leading tank and disabled it with one shot. The remaining T-34s turned and fled westward to safety, but the immobilized tank continued to fire in all directions. Carroll next charged the tank with a hand grenade. Using an ax he found strapped to the vehicle, he attempted to force open the turret hatch cover but was driven off by an enemy crewman. Undaunted, Carroll next grabbed a gasoline can from a nearby abandoned vehicle and doused the tank's deck with fuel. He then ignited the gasoline with a rag torch and jumped clear. No exit was attempted by the enemy tankers, who burned to death in their machine. For his initiative and courage that day, Carroll received the Distinguished Service Cross.¹¹

By the time Corporal Carroll finally dispatched the North Korean T-34 at 0827, Task Force Hill had already attempted to resume its counterattack. This time the weather was clear and dry, but because the 24th Division's sector had been assigned Priority Two by Eighth Army's Air Operations Center, far fewer flights were available for close air support. All along the front, the counterattack sputtered and died. On the right, the 19th Infantry once more made no progress. The remnants of Company A were reorganized under a sergeant but remained in the zone of the 9th Infantry for much of the day. Rather than try to advance, Colonel Moore's 2d Battalion attempted to scrape together a reserve to cover the hole created by Company A's withdrawal. Next to the 19th, the 9th Infantry also was unable to move forward and contented itself with digging in to hold its meager gains of the previous day. Farther south, the depleted 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry, initially made some progress after repelling a North Korean attack before dawn. The battalion attacked in columns of companies. In the lead, Company A moved forward following an artillery preparation and gained the ridge in its immediate front. Suddenly, it was flanked from both sides. Suffering heavy casualties, the company fell back with only forty able-bodied men left. As Company A reorganized, Company B took up the assault and called for an air strike to soften up the enemy positions. Aircraft responded quickly but inaccurately, the strike falling on Company B. Thoroughly disorganized, Company B, too, withdrew to the battalion's original position. The North Koreans followed with a counterattack of their own, but after having made small gains, this attack was broken up by American artillery fire. When

the 34th Infantry's S2 reported to division headquarters at 1030 that "We don't have the stuff," he was speaking only for his regiment. His words, however, seemed applicable to all of the units comprising Task Force Hill (see map 15).¹²

The inability of the 24th Division to destroy or even gain ground against the North Korean 4th Division in the Naktong Bulge had not gone unnoticed by General Walker at Eighth Army headquarters. During the morning of 15 August, Walker visited General Church at Miryang, site of the 24th Division Rear. Displeased that the battle was still not successfully resolved after ten days of fighting, the Eighth Army commander decided to throw one more of his precious reserve units into the fight. As Church later recalled, Walker said, "I am going to give you the Marine Brigade. I want this situation cleared up, and quick." This apparently was an impulsive decision, and Walker delayed implementing it until after conferring with his staff at his Taegu headquarters. Arriving there by noon, Walker confirmed the decision an hour later. The Marines were already en route from the southern part of the Pusan Perimeter to Miryang, where they had been scheduled to become part of Eighth Army's reserve. Walker sent Col. William A. Collier, a member of his staff, to Miryang to meet the Marines' commander, Brig. Gen. Edward Craig, and brief him on the situation. The 24th Division was instructed to provide the Marines with logistical support and transportation upon their arrival.¹³

After Walker had departed for Taegu, but while Church was still at Miryang, the 24th Division commander received a message from Colonel Hill relayed through the division G3 at Kyun'gyo. Sent at 1130, Hill's message was blunt: "The situation is serious, particularly on south flank. It is under heavy attack. Strongly recommend we go on the defensive." Hill indicated that the assistant division commander, Brigadier General Menoher, was with him and concurred in his estimate. Relying upon Walker's earlier promise of reinforcements, Church quickly agreed to cancel Hill's orders to continue the counterattack. Instead, Task Force Hill would once again assume a defensive stance. At the front, where North Korean assaults continued to beat upon the American forward positions, the new posture had already been in effect for several hours. Throughout the remainder of the day and into the evening, the North Koreans maintained their offensive pressure, first against one unit, then against another. Each time they were turned back, most often with the assistance of artillery. The gunners supporting the division fired a total of 3,540 rounds during 128 missions on 15 August, compared with only 2,222 rounds and 91 missions on the previous day. Ammunition was expended at so great a rate, in fact, that the division artillery commander feared that infantry officers were requesting support too freely. No doubt much ammunition was wasted, but in several cases, the artillery support given the depleted and exhausted infantry units of Task Force Hill on 15 August was critical in staving off the violent North Korean assaults.¹⁴

At the same time he learned of Colonel Hill's plea for an end to the counterattack, General Church received Eighth Army's permission to employ

the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, in the northern sector. Although the army staff did not appear inordinately concerned about the North Korean bridgehead near Hyonp'ung, Church was told that the battalion could be used to counter the crossing if he believed it necessary. Near Hyonp'ung, Lieutenant Colonel Hyzer's 3d Engineer (C) Battalion continued its aggressive patrolling all day. Whenever enemy units were encountered, the patrols called down air strikes and artillery fire upon them, with undetermined results. Hyonp'ung had by this time become a deserted no-man's-land, visited intermittently by patrols of both sides. The main North Korean strength remained concentrated around Hill 409, a short distance west of the town, and showed no indication of further movement. Nevertheless, Church decided to use the 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry, to cordon off the small enemy bridgehead. At 2245, the battalion received orders to join the 3d Engineers near Hyonp'ung by 0430 on the following morning. Only the 24th Recon Company now remained to protect the division's MSR.¹⁵

Although the 24th Division's counterattack ground to a halt on 15 August with no appreciable gain, there were a few indications that the North Korean 4th Division was also suffering the effects of ten days of continuous battle. The most significant sign was the increasing number of prisoners taken by the 24th Division. Four prisoners were captured on 15 August, three from the North Korean 4th Division and one from the 10th. There apparently would have been more if an unfortunate incident in the 34th Infantry's sector had not occurred. During that unit's abortive morning assault, approximately twenty-five North Koreans threw away their weapons and attempted to surrender. Misunderstanding their actions, an American soldier fired at them, and the rest of his squad did likewise. Angered, the North Koreans retrieved their weapons and resumed the battle, killing several men of the 34th Infantry. Only one of the North Koreans in this group ultimately surrendered. Information from him, when correlated with that from other prisoners captured that day, indicated that ammunition, supplies, and morale were very low among the enemy. If true, this assessment gave new hope that further counterattacks by the 24th Division might finally eliminate the North Korean thrust into the Naktong Bulge.¹⁶
